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OASIS Hub Aims to Transform Neighborhood, Drive for Investment in Puerto Rico

NICK DECICCO, SENIOR WRITER, NOVOGRADAC

Jeff Monge finds it difficult to emphasize just how vital the OASIS Hub is to the Villa Prades community in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The impact is multilayered. First, there is the practical reality: A \$43 million transformation of a dilapidated former schoolhouse severely damaged by 2017's devastating Hurricane Maria into a mixed-use endeavor that incorporates a school, health clinic, and business and workforce development center.

Further, there is the wider impact for the island of Puerto Rico. Monge, managing director of Monge Capital, which acted as a consultant on the OASIS Hub, sees the development as an entrée for mainland America to invest into the Puerto Rico market.

"This deal is ridiculously material to the island," said Monge. "It's not going to be a panacea, but the effect on so many people, it's humbling."

The stakes are personal for Monge, whose family is from Puerto Rico, once lived there himself and resides in New Jersey.

"I've been in investing for all of my professional career, so over 30 years and this is arguably the most important deal that I feel like I've ever done," said Monge. "It's the 'ready for primetime'-type of a statement that this is a bigger deal than this deal. We have four [Community Development Financial Institutions] that invested in Puerto Rico for the first time. Two [community development entities]. Hopefully, that won't be the last."

Image: Courtesy of Platform for Social Impact

A rendering of the future OASIS Hub in San Juan, Puerto Rico, built in part with new markets tax credits.



Image: Courtesy of Platform for Social Impact
The future OASIS Hub in San Juan, Puerto Rico, will incorporate a school, health clinic, and business and workforce development center.

Combining efforts with Monge Capital are a bevy of partners, including co-sponsors Platform for Social Impact (PSI), a San Juan-based organization that incubates, scales and helps sustain social impact ventures with a primary focus on eradicating child poverty in Puerto Rico, along with Boys and Girls Club of Puerto Rico (BG CPR) and many more. The participants combined on a structure that includes new markets tax credit (NMTC) allocations from Capital One and Civic Builders, among other financing sources.

NMTCs were a “critical component” in making OASIS Hub feasible, said Eduardo Carrera, CEO for PSI and former CEO of BG CPR.

“While other funding sources might have contributed, NMTCs played a significant role in bridging the financing gap and enabling the project to move forward,” said Carrera. “We don’t think it would have been possible in this timeframe to complete the project without the NMTC investments.”

In My Old San Juan

The OASIS Hub weaves together a K-12 school for more than 500 students; the Vidalus Community Health Clinic, which will serve more than 4,000 patients; a project-maker space to create and grow local businesses; and a home for BG CPR.

“This site, once a symbol of missed potential and disinvestment, became the focus of a community-led initiative to break the cycle of poverty,” said Carrera. “The final design was developed to address the educational, health and economic needs of the community, providing

a space where families can thrive and children can dream of a brighter future.”

While the origins of the OASIS Hub were revitalizing the school, the plan evolved to one that takes a multigenerational approach to breaking the cycle of poverty reflective of Vimenti, an integrated services provider and offshoot of BG CPR.

“The journey from abandoned school to OASIS symbolizes the resilience and determination of the people of Villa Prades and surroundings to reclaim their future and build a better tomorrow for generations to come,” said Carrera. “The ambition to undertake the OASIS Hub project stemmed from a recognition of the critical need for comprehensive community development in Puerto Rico. We identified gaps in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities that required a multifaceted approach. The goal was to create a lasting positive impact by integrating these services into a single, cohesive hub.”

The OASIS Hub includes a multifunctional center to provide access to quality education, job training, health services and family support.

“The ultimate goal of the project is to enhance economic mobility and reduce poverty in these regions by providing essential services and opportunities that can drive long-term, sustainable change,” said Carrera.

Ross Hoffman, real estate investment manager with Civic Builders, said the OASIS Hub represents a seismic change for a neighborhood that has been viewed as “extremely distressed.” A walled parking garage structure with minimal access points creates a stark divide between the OASIS site and a luxury shopping mall on the other side, Hoffman said.

“The [Villa Prades] public housing community is very isolated from the surrounding area, almost purposely,” said Hoffman. “This creates disadvantages in part because they don’t have access—literally.”

Carrera said the most challenging aspect of bringing the OASIS Hub together has been aligning the requirements and interests of all the various parties.

“Coordinating diverse expectations and requirements required extensive negotiation and collaboration, but it ultimately led to a cohesive strategy for the project’s success,” said Carrera.

Puerto Rico, I Love You

Beyond the scope of the OASIS Hub, the endeavor represents a broader opportunity to spur economic development on the island.

Those motivations are not without their challenges. One hurdle was the complicated relationship between American laws and laws remaining from vestiges of Spanish rule, said Monge.

Monge along with Hoffman and Amber Roussel Cavallo, senior manager, communications and strategic partnerships for Civic Builders, said an additional challenge was working in multiple languages.

“For an organization like ours, most of our deals do not have multiple languages among other differences, but our team remained committed to PSI and BGCPR because we believed in their vision for revitalizing this community and expanding access to education,” said Cavallo.

OASIS Hub, which will include Puerto Rico’s first public charter school, marks Civic Builders’ first NMTC effort in Puerto Rico.

“Our nonprofit mission is to support bringing high-quality education opportunities where the need is greatest,” said David Umansky, CEO of Civic Builders. “We hope this groundbreaking project in Villa Prades inspires others to invest in Puerto Rico.”

Despite any hurdles, members of the development team expressed hope for what the OASIS Hub portends for the future of community development in Puerto Rico.

“This challenge paved the way for new financial institutions to enter the Puerto Rican market for the first time, thereby expanding the region’s financial landscape and fostering future growth and investment,” said Carrera. “The success of this project not only benefits the immediate community but also helps to build a stronger, more inclusive financial ecosystem in Puerto Rico.”



Image: Courtesy of Platform for Social Impact
The future OASIS Hub in San Juan, Puerto Rico, will include Puerto Rico’s first public charter school.

Financing

Bringing OASIS Hub to bear was no small feat.

The \$100 million endeavor includes \$43 million for the construction of the OASIS Hub and an additional \$57 million allocated for programs and services.

“This comprehensive investment aims to significantly impact and uplift marginalized communities in San Juan,” said Carrera.

Civic Builders allocated \$22 million in NMTCs to the endeavor.

Hoffman said some of the biggest hurdles were bringing the full capital stack in line.

“There was a little bit of chicken in terms of who would commit first and then attract others to support the project,” said Hoffman. “Civic Builders took a leap of faith. We committed to project in the fall of ’22. We kept that commitment for over a two-year period. The project closed in July 2024 on NMTC financing.”

Capital One allocated \$3 million of its own NMTCs as well as invested \$7.6 million in NMTC equity. The investment marked the financier's ninth in Puerto Rico during the past six years.

"OASIS Hub was a great fit for NMTCs as it had strong projected community outcomes, it was designed to meet specific needs and it was successful in bringing private capital into a low-income community in order to make an ambitious dream a reality for members of this low-income community," said John Chamberlain, senior director of tax credit finance for Capital One.

The endeavor received \$15.2 million in Investment Portfolio for Growth Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the Puerto Rico Department of Housing.

OASIS Hub saw the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the Nonprofit Finance Fund, the Low Income Investment Fund and the Raza Fund combine on a \$14.8 million bridge loan for U.S. Department of Education Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief grant. The funds are spend-to-earn, so the OASIS Hub used the loan from the various parties as gap financing.

"For the CDFI partners, for a lot of them, this was their first time lending in Puerto Rico," said Hoffman. "It's the first time Civic Builders was involved in a project in Puerto Rico. It's the first for many in branching out of the credit box to feel comfortable lending in a U.S. territory."

Monge Capital, an early adopter of the OASIS Hub, carried the project for approximately five years on a success fee to help secure the CDBG funds, the CDFI bridge financing, the NMTCs, underwriting and more.

Don Sabine, a principal in Novogradac's Dover, Ohio, office, helped with structuring the transactions.

"Novogradac is honored to participate in such an important transaction in Puerto Rico," said Sabine. "Structuring the

transaction was complicated and, given the possibilities that success might mean for future investment on the island, it was important and satisfying to bring it all together."

Hoffman said the OASIS Hub is an example of why the NMTC incentive exists.

"There's severe distress in all communities, but I think the level of distress, especially in this neighborhood in San Juan, is something that is hard to fathom unless you see it in person yourself," said Hoffman, who has visited the neighborhood. "The lack of investment in Puerto Rico has always been an issue. Attracting capital to the island, for a nonprofit specifically, has been a problem. And new markets is a tool specifically designed to solve such problems."

Carrera expressed gratitude for all members of the financing and development teams.

"We're grateful to all partners involved in this project because they decided to invest in Puerto Rico, especially since Puerto Rico was not part of these portfolios previously," said Carrera. "We want to convey a message that anyone who can invest in this island now has no excuse not to do so."

The team behind the OASIS Hub anticipates completing all phases of development in August 2026. ◆

OASIS HUB FINANCING

- ◆ \$22 million new markets tax credit (NMTC) allocation from Civic Builders
- ◆ \$15.2 million Investment Portfolio for Growth Community Development Block Grant Funds from the Puerto Rico Department of Housing
- ◆ \$14.8 million bridge loan for U.S. Department of Education grant from Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Nonprofit Finance Fund, Low Income Investment Fund and Raza Fund
- ◆ \$7.6 million NMTC equity investment from Capital One
- ◆ \$3 million NMTC allocation from Capital One

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teresa.garcia@novoco.com

925.949.4232

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925.949.4216

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