



# CONSTRUCTING BOAT & RV STORAGE

Building homes for big boys' toys.

By Caesar Wright

**W**hether offered as a stand-alone business or part of a traditional self-storage operation, boat and RV storage is on the rise, and one of the primary questions of operators in the industry is: How can I make this kind of storage "pencil out" on my property? Land costs are also climbing throughout the nation, so before committing to the business, you must determine if your site will attract enough clientele to make a boat/RV-storage venture profitable.

Boat, RV and other vehicle storage can yield many benefits to the savvy operator. The most notable are:

- Customers tend to be long-term, resulting in low turnover and high occupancy rates.
- Facility management is less intensive (reduced customer turnover equals fewer operational issues and paperwork).
- There is usually less competition for this service in most markets than for self-storage.

But there are also drawbacks:

- Boat and RV storage is land-intensive.
- Depending on your location, business may be only seasonal.
- Rental rates are usually lower on a per-square-foot basis than traditional self-storage.

## Design Options

There are three basic design options for boat and RV storage: complete outdoor parking, canopy parking (or roof-only storage), and fully enclosed storage. Outdoor parking is the simplest and cheapest choice, as it involves only

paving and striping for spaces. Land parcels often have some amount of "dead space," meaning a piece of land that may be unsuitable for enclosed storage or traditional self-storage. These plots may work well for outdoor boat and RV parking.

Canopy parking can be surprising to developers when it comes to cost. Depending where your facility is located, "roof only" structures may still need to comply with local building codes. Even though there are no walls, the footings will need to be deeper and the roof may require additional bracing to handle the uplift loads. With these two factors combined, fully enclosed structures begin to look more attractive—at least from a cost standpoint, since you'll be able to charge more for the rental of the unit.

When building fully enclosed storage for boats and RVs, carefully consider your layout and unit mix. You'll find you are able to use approximately 35 percent of the land parcel for actual storage. The remainder will accommodate aisles and turnarounds. It's crucial to give amateur drivers enough room to safely maneuver their vehicles. Driveway widths average between 55 and 60 feet. Bay widths are usually 13 feet, with building heights of 16 feet to accommodate 14-foot doors.

## Staying Atop the Market

While operating boat and RV storage may mean you have fewer competitors in your market, it does not mean you can just sit back

and watch the profits roll in. Marketing and competitive rental rates are critical.

There are two key elements to keeping your boat and RV storage consistently full. First, visit other facilities in your area. Talk to managers. Find out what unit sizes are popular. Are customers being turned away because unit sizes are too big or small? Are their access doors big enough to accommodate larger vehicles? What rental rates does the market support?

You should also visit local marinas and campgrounds to find out what potential customers desire in a storage facility. What features are most important to them? What do they consider to be a reasonable cost? What is an acceptable distance between the storage site and their home or place of play? While visiting these places, make contact with the on-site management. They may be willing to produce referrals on a commission basis.

The second key to success is diversification. People with "big toys" usually have big wallets to match. Help them spend their money! If market research and property allow, provide all three types of storage to accommodate different needs and budgets. Offer a variety of unit and door sizes. You can also offer amenities such as vehicle washing and maintenance, ice service, dumping stations, gas stations, parking services, or whatever else you can do to make things easier for customers. This range of products and services will help your manager sell your facility to prospects and create better relationships with clients.

Boat and RV storage is a booming business that can be combined with conventional self-storage or stand on its own. As community restrictions and homeowners' associations increasingly prohibit storage or parking of leisure vehicles at residences, people will need storage for their expensive hobbies. Today, demand for this type of storage exceeds supply in most areas, creating tremendous opportunities for wise investors. ♣



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