CARMEL RESTAURANT IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (CRID)
COMMITTEE MEETING
Sunset Center and via Video Conference
Tuesday, June 16, 2026 at 10 am

MINUTES

Committee Members Present: April Montgomery, Links Club; Gian Pepe, Pepe Int'l; Greg Ahn, 7&D; Sunny Shour, Marc + Rose; Monique Black, Chez Noir (virtual); Anthony Carnazzo, Stationaery; Janet Elarmo, Aubergine.

Committee Members Absent: Ashley Wolff, Jeju Kitchen; Lorena Chaarani, Grill on Ocean Ave.

Also in Attendance: Amy Herzog and Jeff Burghardt, Visit Carmel; Sophia Stewart, Taryn Rosenblum, from J/PR (virtual); Ashlee Wright and Nile Estep (virtual) from Good Roots; Walter Georis, Casanova; Daniel Spilfogel, Flaherty's; Bashar Sneeh; Dametra Group; Lee Morcus, Hog's Breath Inn; Carrie Theis, Hofsas House; Suzanne Gravell, CARS; Rich Pepe, Pepe International.

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: April Montgomery, chair called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

Public Comment: Carrie discussed the challenges that are occurring at City Hall regarding tourism funding. Specifically Visit Carmel retracted its investment request for $120,000. See Monterey funding was tabled and the City budget was approved without that $292,000 investment. The topic will be addressed at a July 6 City Council meeting. Discussion from many in the group focused on the targeted marketing that See Monterey provides and that it will have a detrimental effect on local business owners if it is not funded. The group discussed strategies for educating the council and residents about the importance of tourism to the local economy, including potential targeted marketing campaigns to residents.

Minutes:
Motion to approve the minutes from February 10, 2026 and April 14, 2026. Motion to approve both sets of minutes made by Greg Ahn. Seconded by Sunny. Passed unanimously.

Carmel Culinary Week Debrief Report:

The marketing team of Amy, Jeff and Sophia each reported on the results and metrics from Carmel Culinary Week 2026.

Overview points
CBTS is staking its claim as a culinary destination. Coverage from media like T+L, Conde Nast Traveler, and Elle help support. Went through the Objectives of the event itself for both the destination overall as well as the restaurants. Also reviewed previous restaurant feedback that led us to where we are now – festival-like atmosphere, more community, use our unique locales.

Marketing and Media

Jeff reviewed paid media mix, going for drive marketing, fly markets and locals. Sunset mag is lead media sponsor. Mix of Connected TV, digital, print and local TV and radio. Showed halo effect from media standpoint and can track conversions. Discussed branding with the credentials, wristbands, VIP indicators.

PR and Social Media Pre-and Live Promotion
Sophia presented the social media had significant engagement metrics, including over 600,000 organic impressions and 200,000 views across 240 Instagram story slides and 30 feed posts. Began promoting March 1. Pre-promotion coverage in publications like Travel and Leisure and NBC Los Angeles, and successfully promoted the culinary destination through various social media tactics including live event coverage and pre-recorded content.

Nicole reviewed the live coverage on social media which included stories on each event and then reels on each event. New video shooter and a still photographer this year shot each event and we posted the reels the next day. We also covered every individual restaurant that had specials or events. A way to showcase every participating restaurant in some way.

During event J/PR had arranged media and content creator attendance. The team noted strong engagement from social media creators, including a viral reel of the tuna procession that gained over 400,000 views, and expressed confidence about selling 60% of next year's tickets to returning attendees.

Carmel Culinary Week Sales Goals
The team reviewed the success of Carmel's Culinary Week, which sold 1,337 tickets generating $167,800 in gross revenue, significantly exceeding initial goals. They discussed the financial arrangement with Good Roots, who handled ticket sales and retained most of the revenue while Visit Carmel paid $117,000 in management fees (and guaranteed $104,000 in tickets sales, which were exceeded so no payment made). The events attracted a mix of local attendees (47%) and visitors from drive markets (41%) and out-of-state (12%), with La Dolce Vita being the most locally attended event.

Carmel Culinary Week Feedback Results
Amy presented survey results from Carmel Culinary Week attendees, showing social media as the top referral source, print ads were also a top referral. Among non-local attendees, nearly 1/3 stayed in a Carmel hotel (31.6%), and almost 1/4 stayed three nights or more (24.1%), indicating meaningful overnight visitation and lodging impact. Top age range was 61-80.

- Over half (53%) of attendees to the signature events were from out of town. 54.4% came from Monterey County
- 30.6% came from key CA visitor markets
- 12% traveled from out of state (TX strongest)
- Bay Area remains largest non-local feeder market, accounting for 18.3% of all attendees.
- **Ultimate Pass** - Clear tourism product. More than one-third of attendees came from out of state. Highest visitor concentration of any offering.

The feedback revealed positive sentiment overall, with attendees appreciating the food quality, music, and community atmosphere, though several issues were identified including insufficient seating at Soiree, food running out early, and crowd management problems.

Areas for improvement: more seating at Soiree especially and too crowded. VIP benefits unclear and still had lines. Food ran out early at Soiree. And could use a better flow of traffic at Soiree as well.

Walter Georis expressed concerns about the current format of the food and wine events, arguing that while marketing is successful, the events are damaging to the community and overburdening restaurateurs. He suggested redefining the events to better showcase culinary talents rather than focusing on touristy trade shows. Nile sought clarification from other participants about whether restaurants felt abused by the current setup, particularly given Walter's strong criticism. No others corroborated those feelings.

Pepe commented on being careful about getting too big. The solution maybe to add more events instead of expanding the existing ones. There was lots of continuing conversation, with participants expressing mixed views on the financial impact during the event week versus the longer-term benefits for building Carmel's culinary reputation.

Culinary Week Financial Review
The meeting focused on reviewing the financials and feedback for Culinary Week, an event produced by Good Roots. Amy presented detailed cost breakdowns showing total expenses of $318,210, with breakdown as:

EVENT PRODUCTION	**$ 131,176**
MARKETING COSTS	**$ 149,154**
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COSTS	**$ 37,880**
	$ 318,210

$117,250 from Visit Carmel went to Good Roots, which also assumes responsibility of selling the tickets and retaining that revenue, estimated to be $267,000 in gross sales. The group discussed how these costs compare to revenue, noting that while Culinary Week represents about 46% of RID revenue, many costs like professional services would exist regardless of the event. The discussion included feedback about event organization and improvements for future years, with participants acknowledging the event's growth and positive impact on restaurant revenue over the past four years, which has outpaced CPI growth.

Greg Ahn made some valuable points about overall growth. Understood that costs for running restaurants are going up and margins are more difficult than ever. We need marketing to focus on quality over quantity. But imagine if the revenues weren't also going up. Bashar made the point that Culinary Week has to be a benefit, bottom line, that is how to evaluate it. Revenue from that week should not be the metric, but the halo effect the imagery and marketing are creating the increased desire to be in Carmel through the year.

Pepe questioned if we need to spend so much in paid media, since we sold out the tickets. Jeff reinforced that now we have a following and assets. But also the point is that we have something to market and should lean into the halo effect.

Next year's Culinary Week scheduled for June 4-12, 2027. U.S. Open will take place at Pebble Beach Golf Links from June 17–20, 2027.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting:

The committee agreed to meet in September to continue the conversation.

Meeting adjourned at 12:10 pm.