CARMEL HOSPITALITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (CHID)
VISIT CARMEL
BOARD OF DIRECTORS REGULAR MEETING
Stilwell Hotel and on Zoom
Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA 93921
Thursday, July 16, 2026
2:30 PM

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Carrie Theis, Hofsas House; Susan Dampier, Marc + Rose Hospitality; Tim Twomey, CRA; Kati Enea, Carmel Chamber; Chris Morello, MRY; Amy Herzog, Executive Director; Brandon Swanson, City of Carmel; Candace Fecteau, Stillwell Hotels; Pam Sheppard, Horizon Inn and Ocean View Lodge; Rich Pepe, Pepe International (virtual); Mark Watson, Inns-by-the-Sea.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Jeff Burghardt, Visit Carmel; Nicole Dore, Visit Carmel (virtual); Marrissa Mallory, J/PR (virtual); Sophia Stewart, J/PR (virtual); Taryn Rosenblum, J/PR (virtual); Rob O'Keefe, See Monterey (virtual); Graeme Robertson, CRA; Emily Kim, Chamber intern; April Montgomery, Links Club; Lee Morcus, Hog's Breath Inn.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Greg Ahn, 7D/Folktale; Mark Stilwell, Stilwell Hotels

Carrie Theis, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 2:30pm and confirmed that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- The Chamber of Commerce is hosting the Carmel-by-the-Sea Book Festival on Saturday, running all day at Carmel Plaza starting at 9:00 a.m., concluding with the unveiling of the "Hearts of Carmel" at 2:30 p.m.
- The Heritage Society Home Tour is also taking place this Saturday.
- No other public comments were offered.

MINUTES:
The minutes from the June 18 meeting were distributed in advance via email. Candace Fecteau made a motion to approve the minutes, Mark Watson seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE:
Carrie asked for two board members to volunteer to make up the Ad hoc Nominating Committee, which will be tasked with looking at upcoming open board seats and finding nominees. Susan Dampier and Pam Sheppard were asked to serve on the Committee. Motion to accept was made by Carrie and seconded by Candace. Passed unanimously.

SEE MONTEREY UPDATE
The Carmel City Council approved $292,000 in funding to See Monterey for the next fiscal year, following a coordinated letter-writing and public-comment campaign by restaurateurs, residents,

hoteliers, and former council members. Rob thanked the group for the advocacy effort, noting 15 letters and 13 public commenters, with only one comment in opposition.

Discussion followed on the pending Visitor Management / Visitor Experience Management Study:

- See Monterey is engaging a consultant, Cathy Ritter, to lead the process; a contract is in progress and a kickoff call was scheduled for the following day.
- See Monterey will fund and help guide the study, but the Carmel Residents Association, the Chamber, and other local stakeholders will manage the process locally.
- Communications protocol: updates will route through Brandon (city staff liaison) rather than to an individual council member, to avoid Brown Act concerns; Brandon will disseminate to the full Council. The Mayor may bring periodic updates to the Council as agenda items.
- Cathy Ritter will be in-market at least twice (late August/early September and again in October) and plans one-on-one stakeholder interviews with approximately 15–20 individuals (e.g., police chief, city staff, hoteliers, restaurateurs, residents).
- The study will proceed in phases: Phase 1 will produce data analysis, best practices, and recommendations; a later phase will address organizational/communications and infrastructure needs.
- A related regional "events gap analysis" study (via Hunden Partners, ~140 pages) was also discussed, evaluating current and potential event venues and opportunities region-wide, including further collaboration on Carmel events such as Culinary Week.
- Overtourism messaging: See Monterey reported no sustained increase in negative "Carmel overtourism" sentiment, though awareness of issues at Bixby Bridge and Point Lobos continues. The group discussed proactively reframing the narrative — e.g., highlighting Carmel's actual occupancy (71%, not 95%), the distinction between overnight visitors and day-trip/social-media-driven crowds, and Carmel's leadership on responsible-tourism practices.
- See Monterey's "One More Night" third-night-free promotion will relaunch this fall; prior cycles included 24 participating hotels countywide, with a goal of 30–40 participants going forward. More details expected end of July.
- Visit California announced a new President/CEO, Julie Coker, succeeding a 30-year incumbent.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Administrative / Governance

- Motion: to add all current officers as authorized signers on the Visit Carmel bank account, alongside existing signer Mark, and to authorize Mark (Treasurer) to execute related bank forms. Made by Pam Sheppard, seconded by Susan Dampier. Motion passed unanimously; no opposition.
- An updated addendum was signed with JPR (PR agency) reflecting the approved fiscal-year budget; no new contract was executed, figures were simply reconciled to budget.
- The organization's business license with the City was reviewed and confirmed current.
- June e-blast recapped Culinary Week and the new Chicago nonstop flight; the July e-blast will recap city funding outcomes, the See Monterey partnership, and introduce the Visitor Experience Management Study to the community.

New Innkeepers / Community

- Two new hotel GMs were welcomed to the community: Alex Strandburg at Cypress Inn (formerly of Carmel Mission Inn) and Joseph Lewis at Le Petit Pali Properties.
- The Board agreed to reinstate the annual Innkeeper Dinner; the Executive Director will identify dates and check for calendar conflicts.

Upcoming Events / Meetings

- Meet the Makers, 7th Annual on October 10. Planning kickoff meeting on Monday with gallery owners and event partner Marci Bracco.

- Carmel Wine Walk: next Thursday, open to all Carmel wineries (Wine Walk participants and non-participants) to review the Wine Walk program, marketing, and industry trends.
- June visitor center metrics showed a year-over-year uptick in walk-ins, phone inquiries, and hotel bookings.

RID Update

- A planning meeting with Good Roots (Culinary Week producer) is set for August 6 at Sunset Center to begin framing next year's Culinary Week, given the need for an early-year marketing launch (this year's launched in January). — will include a deeper financial review of Culinary Week spending.
- Accepting nominations for members for the CRID Marketing Committee.
- General RID marketing committee meeting: Tuesday, September 15 at Sunset Center
- Clarification: Carmel has 60 full-service restaurants and 10 quick-service/coffee establishments (both categories classified as "restaurants" under city code); total restaurant count has not materially increased, contrary to a public comment made at a recent City Council meeting.
- Char Steakhouse is expected to open this month.
- Culinary Week cost approximately $317,000 across combined RID/HID budgets for four events (half of which is roughly 50% of the RID budget); the Board raised questions about ROI and the "halo effect," to be examined further at the August 6 and September 15 meetings.

Airport Update

- Chicago nonstop service ends August 15; the carrier has indicated a likely return next summer with a possible extended season through October.
- LAX and Denver service have been up-gauged to larger aircraft, adding roughly 1,000 seats/week; June traffic was up 12% year-over-year, with a further 12% seat increase in the first two weeks of July.
- A third daily San Francisco flight began in June; a fourth is expected in the fall. LA seasonal service, originally slated to end in September, has been extended to November.
- Airport construction is underway; front-of-terminal access may take longer — hotels should remind departing guests to allow extra time.
- As part of environmental mitigation, a new roundabout will be installed at Garden Road/Highway 68 (city-owned road, airport-funded construction) to improve access to the new terminal.

Car Week

- The City-funded shuttle from Larson Field returns this year with improvements: added restrooms, one wheelchair-accessible shuttle, and Tuesday–Thursday operation (8:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.), with capacity for 350–400 cars. The Mission again limited use of the field to Tuesday–Thursday this year; organizers will continue requesting expanded days for future years.
- Employee parking: the lot will remain open beyond shuttle hours; employees without shuttle service can walk or arrange a ride back to their vehicles.
- The Prancing Ponies event has been cancelled for this year.
- New enforcement tool: the Police Department has acquired "Pike Down," a legally enforceable exhaust-decibel meter, and has trained officers ahead of Car Week to address noise complaints.
- A weekly internal cohort is meeting ahead of Car Week to prepare additional downtown-management measures; a broader multi-jurisdictional "command center" effort has stalled at the state level but may be revisited next year.
- Community feedback noted some longtime Car Week visitors are staying away, citing increased noise, added "side show" activity, and rising event/hotel costs.

Community Relations & Website

- The Executive Director will revamp the "Visit Carmel" section of the website for easier navigation, and is considering adding a community comment portal (decision pending) and posting Management District Plan (MDP) materials for transparency.
- The Board discussed adding a semi-annual community workshop/town hall (in addition to the formal Annual Meeting) to proactively educate residents on tourism's economic impact and dispel misconceptions, potentially co-hosted with the Carmel Residents Association and the Chamber.
- See Monterey's Annual Meeting confirmed for September 17, free and open to the public, at the Conference Center (with intent to return to Sunset Center next year if feasible).
- Next Visit Carmel Board meeting confirmed for Thursday, September 24; invitations to follow.

Financial Report

- March–April period revenue: $343,000 actual vs. $276,000 budgeted (revenue up $67,000 for the month; up $156,000 year-to-date).
- Public relations spend: on budget for the month; $18,700 under budget year-to-date.
- Marketing: $16,000 over budget for the month but $33,000–$34,000 under budget year-to-date (once airport co-op contributions are properly accounted for, marketing is effectively on budget).
- Event production over budget by $45,000 for the year, driven by Culinary Week settlement costs (previously approved by the Board as an over-budget expenditure).
- Administrative costs $6,000 under budget for the year; total expenses $13,000 under budget.
- Cash flow approximately $170,000 ahead of budget; fiscal year ending with roughly $900,000 in the bank.

Competitive Set Highlights

- RevPAR growth (year-over-year, March–April period): Carmel +29%, Santa Barbara +26%, Monterey +8%, Calistoga +2%.
- Occupancy: Carmel led the comp set at 76%, up 12% year-over-year — outperforming Monterey, Calistoga (51%), and Yountville (55%).
- ADR: Carmel rose from $339 to $381 (+12%), versus Monterey +4% and Calistoga +10% (Calistoga's ADR gain came with an 11% occupancy loss).
- RevPAR share of comp set grew from 15% to 17.7% — the largest share gain in the group.
- Cumulative RevPAR growth since the HID's creation: +9.1% average annual increase vs. CPI of +3.8%, compared to +2.3% RevPAR growth and +2.4% CPI in the ten years prior to the HID.
- The Board discussed how to message strong occupancy/RevPAR growth publicly without feeding an "overtourism" narrative — emphasizing that overnight, higher-spending visitors are a different population than the day-trip crowds driving congestion at sites like Point Lobos and Bixby Bridge.

MARKETING & ADVERTISING REPORT

- Culinary Week recap videos (overall and restaurant-specific) have been produced and posted; a new production team (previously worked with Aspen Food & Wine, Charleston Food & Wine, and Pebble Beach Food & Wine) elevated the creative quality.
- Fiscal-year totals: ~19 million television (connected + linear) impressions; ~76 million impressions across Meta/Google (including carousel, video, and Performance Max AI-driven ad products); ~1 million print reach; ~2 million email impressions across 28 e-blasts sent.
- Top website traffic sources (12-month): paid social (Meta) is growing; organic search is declining due to AI search/summary changes; direct traffic is up; paid search (text ads) traffic is down in volume but remains high-quality/high-dwell-time; email traffic is down in volume but more

engaged; connected TV impressions are down due to rising per-spot costs but reach a valuable national/fly-market audience (~20,000 spots run this year).

- Referral traffic to hotel websites saw record numbers March–June; example cited: Carmel Country Inn saw a 224% increase in book-direct revenue attributable to Visit Carmel referral traffic (year-to-date, calendar year).
- Paid hotel "sizzle reel" prospecting campaign is outperforming benchmark click-through rates (3.75% vs. 0.9% average).
- Expedia partnership closed the year at a 12.5x return on ad spend (up from 12.4x at last report); Booking.com is being added to the OTA marketing mix.
- 21 hotels are now integrated via "Jack Rabbit" for real-time rate display on the Visit Carmel site; some properties remain unable to connect due to reservation-system limitations.
- Fall production: three new cinematic "film trailer" style brand videos in development (a Highway One road-trip couple, a girlfriends' getaway/flight arrival, and a returning-visitors love-story concept).
- Dining Guide, Wine Walk brochure, and Best Kept Carmel/Art Walk/Car Week materials have been refreshed, including updated Bixby Bridge no-stopping/no-parking messaging and Car Week shuttle details.

PR & SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT

PR/Earned Media

- Earned media impressions: 2.2 billion for the fiscal year, well above the 1 billion goal, despite declining organic search/traffic trends industry-wide.
- Total placements: reached approximately 75% of the 115-placement goal.
- Average share of voice exceeded the 15% target.
- Barcelona Principles quality score met/exceeded the goal of 90; the FY27 goal has been raised to 92.
- Hosted 25 journalists/influencers/content creators this year; that number will be reduced next year alongside a reduced hosting budget.
- Notable placements included the San Francisco Chronicle, SFGATE, San Diego Magazine, Sunset Magazine, Secret Los Angeles, Observer, Dossier, Travel + Leisure (including a six-page feature), and a national piece on small U.S. towns.
- Carmel Culinary Week coverage included Elle magazine, NBC Los Angeles, and a dedicated Travel + Leisure feature.
- FY27 goals: reduced total-reach/impression targets (reflecting industry-wide AI-driven search declines); placement goal held flat; share-of-voice and Barcelona Principles goals raised; total hosted-visit count reduced to 18 (no group press trip planned); increased focus on GEO/AEO (generative/answer engine optimization), blog content development, and proactive community-relations support.

Social

- Share-of-reach rate exceeded 1% (industry average is well under 1%).
- Follower growth substantially exceeded goal: grew from ~146,000 to over 275,000 combined followers across Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok (against a 214,000 target).
- Engagement rate exceeded the 4–5% target range (vs. ~1% Facebook and ~2.2% Instagram industry averages).
- Instagram organic views increased year-over-year; Facebook views (organic and paid) declined, consistent with broader platform and AI-search trends.

- TikTok views reached approximately 400,000 against a 1.3 million goal, reflecting a deliberate budget emphasis on Instagram and Facebook over TikTok.
- Qualitative wins: refreshed visual/editorial tone across channels, updated story highlights, a balanced content mix (~30% hotels, plus restaurants/shops/galleries and stewardship messaging), and strong performance from campaigns including “A Dog Lover’s Guide to Carmel-by-the-Sea,” “Best Seat in the House,” “Fairy Tale Cottages,” and a Fourth of July real-time content series.
- FY27 priorities: continued content-capture missions, deeper campaign-specific content (e.g., “Timeless Charm Worth Protecting,” “Stay and Seek,” and a new “by the Sea, by the Plate” campaign), and continued destination-stewardship messaging.

Other Business

Guest-Origin Data Sharing

Marissa proposed collecting anonymized guest-origin data (city/state/zip only, no property-identifying detail) from participating hotels on a quarterly or annual basis to build a larger, aggregated dataset for market analysis. Mark noted data-cleaning challenges (inconsistent state/zip formatting, incomplete OTA-sourced contact data). The group agreed a follow-up email to hoteliers outlining the request and confidentiality approach would be appropriate.

Stakeholder Education/AI & Social Media Workshop

The Board discussed reinstating an annual (or semi-annual) stakeholder workshop on evolving social media and AI/search topics (e.g., GEO, AEO, platform changes such as the Meta Verified rebrand), potentially timed around the Annual Meeting or mid-year. JPR referenced an article on tourism boards building AI-readiness toolkits for stakeholders (citing the Saudi Ministry of Tourism as an example) as a possible model.

No further agenda items raised. Meeting adjourned at 4:47pm.