Experience Management Analysis for Carmel-by-the-Sea

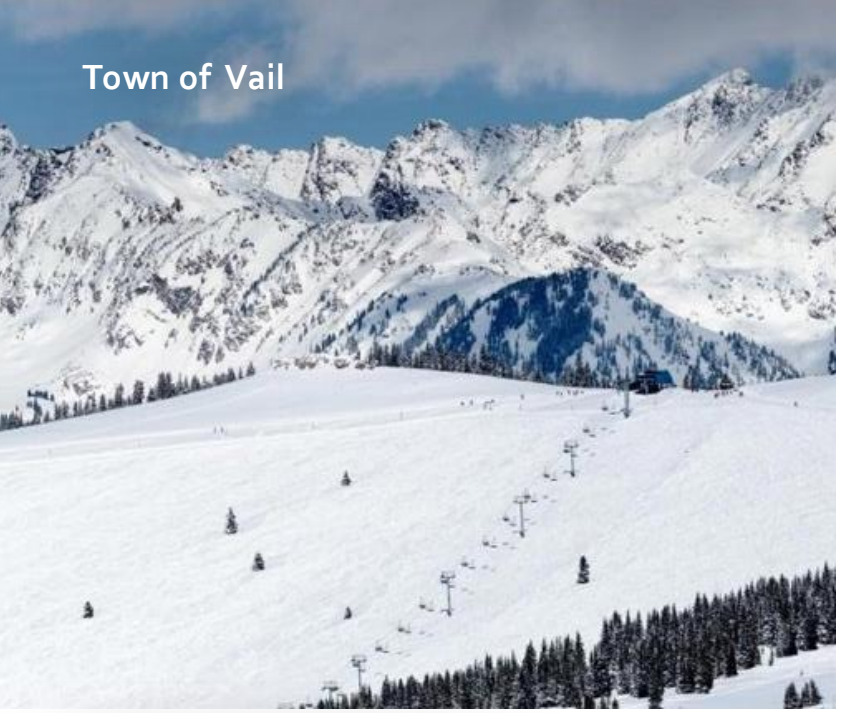
Community Town Hall

Oct. 8, 2026

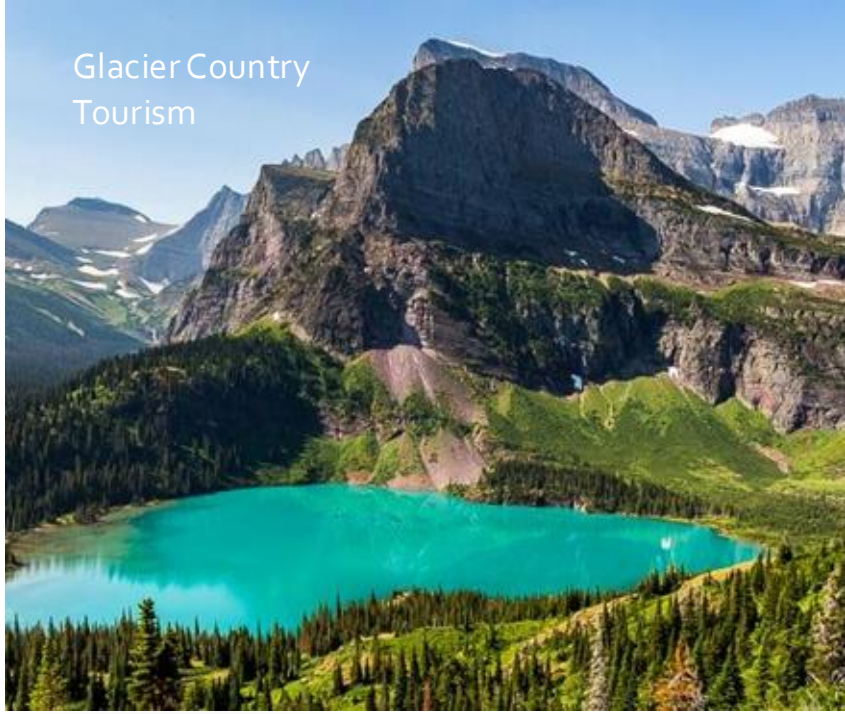
Better Destinations LLC

Today's Agenda

- Project Update
- 3 Scenarios
- 4 Success Stories
- Findings to Date
- Next Steps


Town of Vail

Tahoe Regional Planning Authority


Glacier Country
Tourism

Hawai'I Tourism Authority

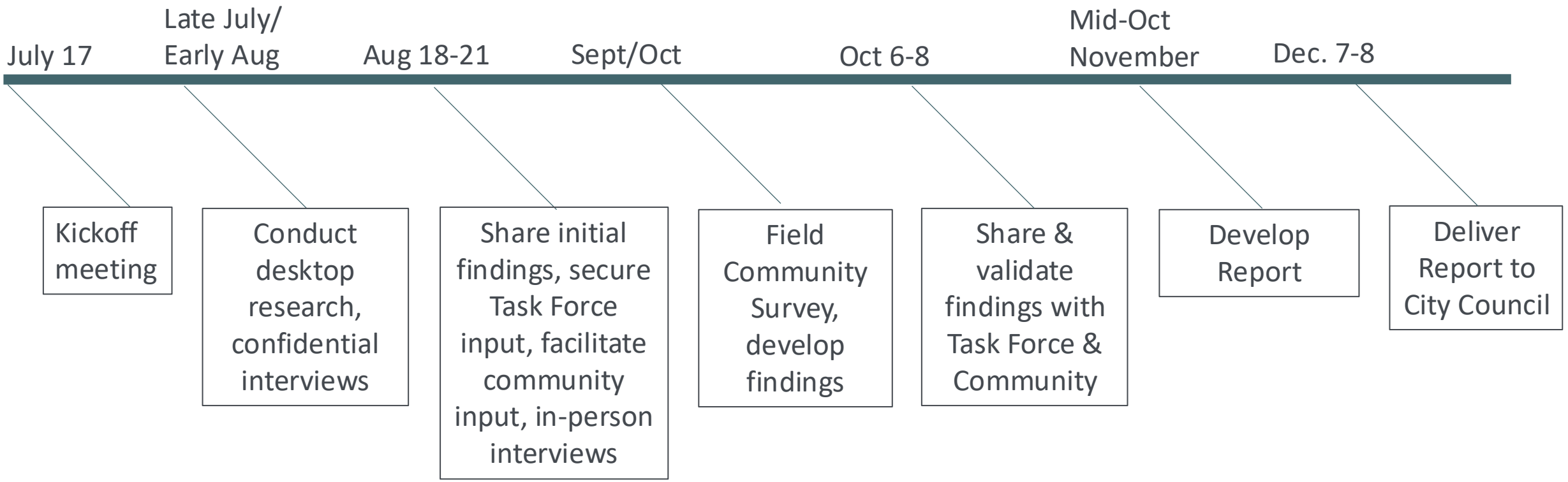
Grand County/Moab UT

Travel Nevada

The Objective

Identify opportunities to manage tourism in Carmel-by-the-Sea while safeguarding the community's unique character, economic vitality, resident quality of life, and visitor experience.

A Fast-Paced Timeline



Project update

31 CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEWS

- City: All 5 Council Members, Administrator, Police Chief
- All 7 Task Force Members
- 9 Residents
- 5 Business Operators
- Regional leaders: County Supervisor Daniels, MST, Park It for Parks

DESKTOP RESEARCH: Ongoing

- Review of reports, plans, databases relating to Carmel-by-the-Sea tourism

COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS

- Aug 20: Completed
- Oct. 8: In Progress

PROGRESS REPORTS TO CITY & COUNCIL: Ongoing

Early Learnings

- Project timing was not optimal. This work has unfolded against major distractions: Ballot measures, a citywide election, even wildfires.
- It's important to bring a wider range of representation to the task force.
- Visitation increases, especially in day visitation, and the recent loss of 42 parking spaces have intensified pressures.
- There seems to be a growing sense that this is an important discussion.

3 Scenarios

Scenario 1

Limit or Stop Tourism Marketing

The problem in recent years is social media. More people are being exposed to just how beautiful it is here. The megaphone is louder than it's ever been.

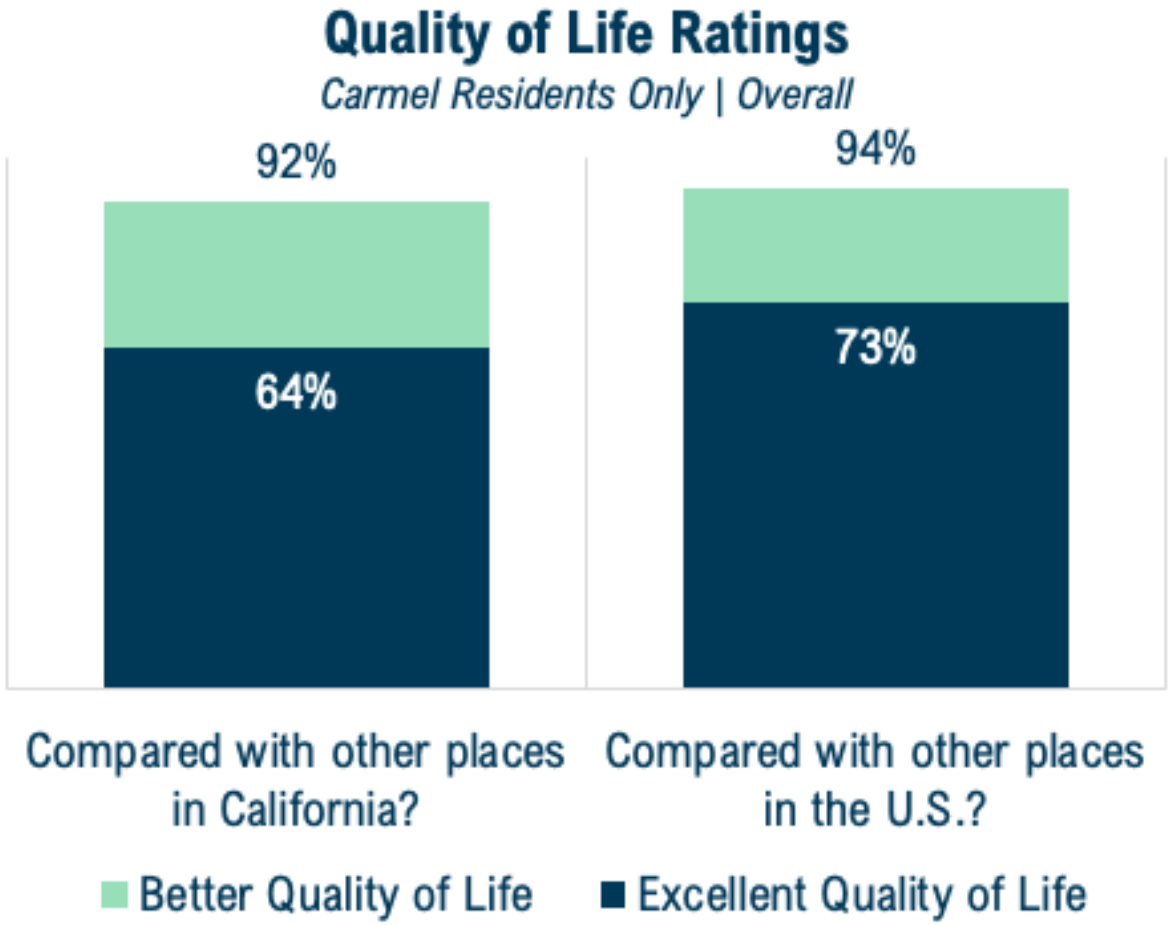
I think we could market less. Everyone knows about Carmel. Maybe we've oversold. The fairytale is disappearing.

We're challenging the people spending the money to prove that they are really targeting who they say they are.

It feels like too many people are coming because we are overmarketing the town.

Scenario 2

Leave Well Enough Alone



Source: SMARInsights Survey, Oct 2026

Carmel-by-the-Sea is special. We're not interested in being spectacular.

A lot of people want what will never come back.

As a resident, I don't see that we have too much tourism. What is happening really is the problem with parking.

We don't have the right to tell people they can't come.

A lot of day visitors book a hotel elsewhere and come here to spend time. Those folks are welcome. It's like what we did for 35 years before we moved here.

Scenario 3

Manage Tourism Better

Not even
Clint
could get
it done.

The city has done nothing to solve anything relating to fixing overtourism issues in the past 10 years.

It's not an overtourism problem, it's an undermanagement of tourism problem.

It's irresponsible for a town to invite people to their home and then lock the door.

The reality is that this city doesn't function without visitors.

It's the day trippers who aren't carrying their weight. If we had paid parking they'd pay their way.

4 Success Stories

Visit Lake Tahoe won voter support for the new Tahoe Blue Event Center with a promise: to build it without parking.

The Town of Vail manages its capacity for day visitation with parking and transit options. Nearly all public parking is concentrated in two city structures, which also house a meeting space and the Colorado Snowsports Museum. Pricing is dynamic — free in summer. Denver day skiers can load their gear onto a Bustang motorcoach and ride to Vail for $17.

Travel North Tahoe Nevada helped fund the new LakeLink microtransit service to ease visitor traffic congestion. The first year, 80% of ridership was locals.

The City of Laguna Beach used a New Zealand company's 'Frog' technology to guide motorists to available parking spots quickly and efficiently. Visitors pay $7 an hour. Locals pay $80 for a two-year 'shopping pass.'

Findings To Date

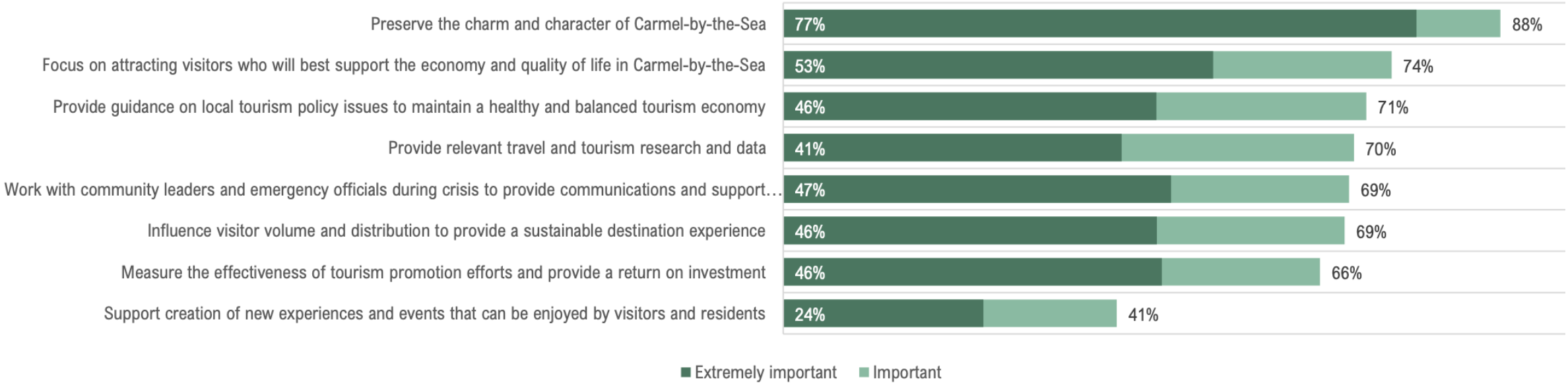
Caveats

- For now, findings reflect insights from desktop research and community input, especially from the community survey, the Aug 20 Town Hall, and 31 confidential interviews.
- Findings will continue to be shaped by the community survey and deeper exploration of geolocation data tracking visitor volume and movements.

Protecting this place is Job 1. Carmel-by-the-Sea shares a strong desire to safeguard the character of their community. As the survey showed, this directive must be at the heart of any tourism strategy.

How important is it for See Monterey and Visit Carmel to focus on the following activities?

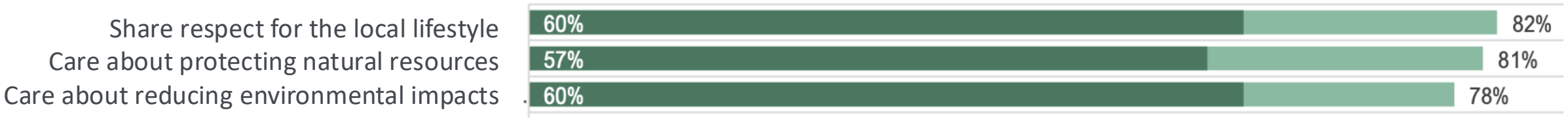
Carmel Residents Only



Source: SMARInsights Survey, Oct 2026

The visitors that Carmel-by-the-Sea residents prefer are people who care about safeguarding what makes Carmel special. These qualities are far more important than attracting overnight guests, international visitors, or people who come at less busy times or stay longer.

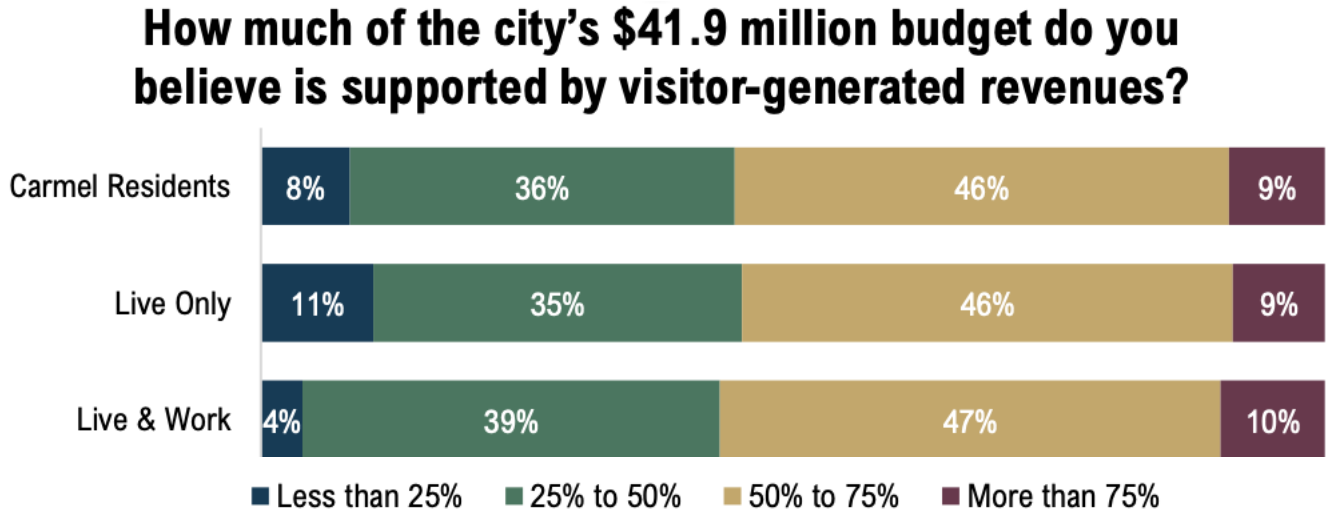
To support the local economy, See Monterey and Visit Carmel should focus on attracting more visitors who …



Source: SMARInsights Survey, Oct 2026

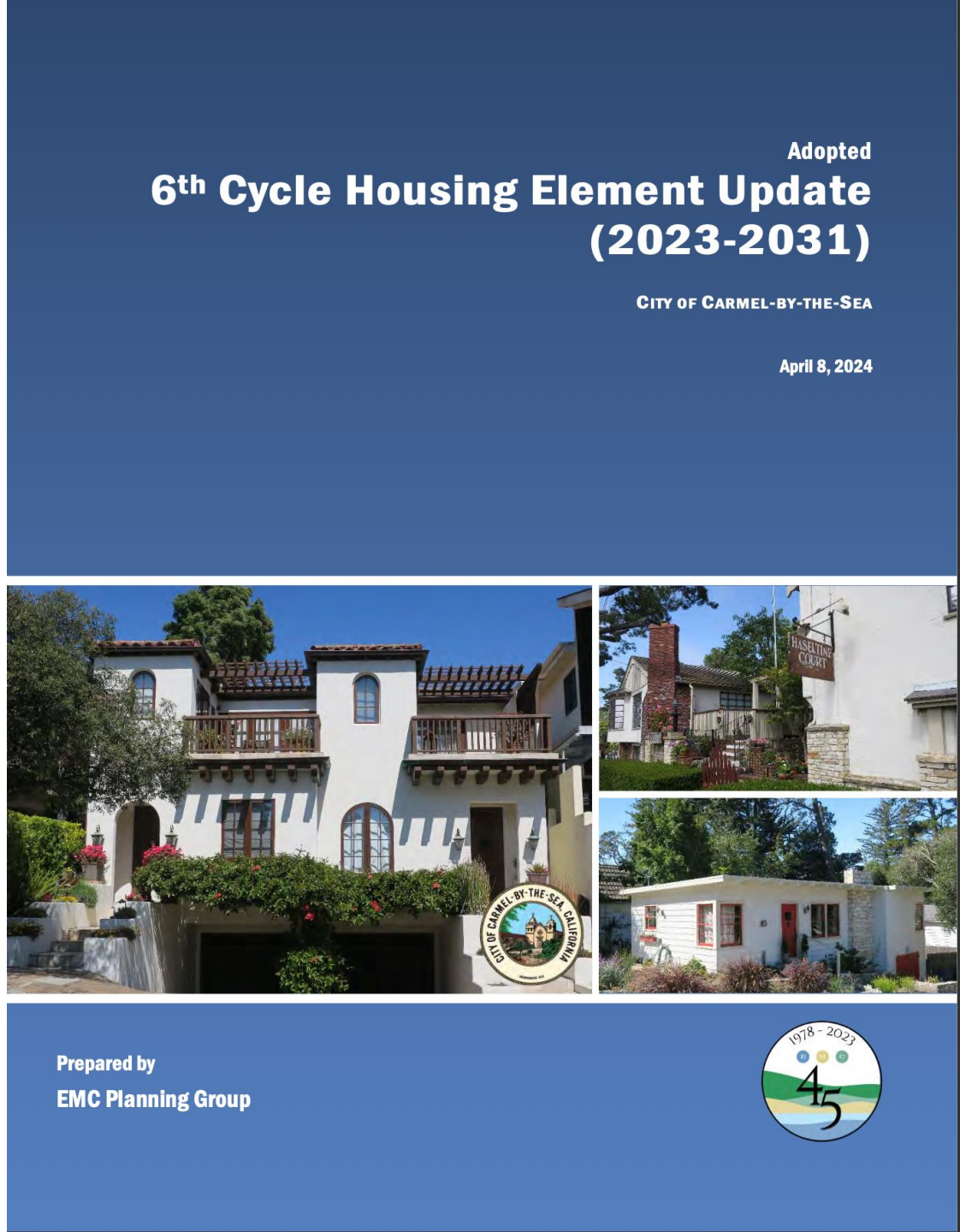
To a great degree, the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea runs on visitor revenues.

- TOT contributes at least 25% of the city's revenues for FY2026-27.
- Sales and use taxes provide another 23%.
- To be determined: Property tax and other fees coming from tourism.



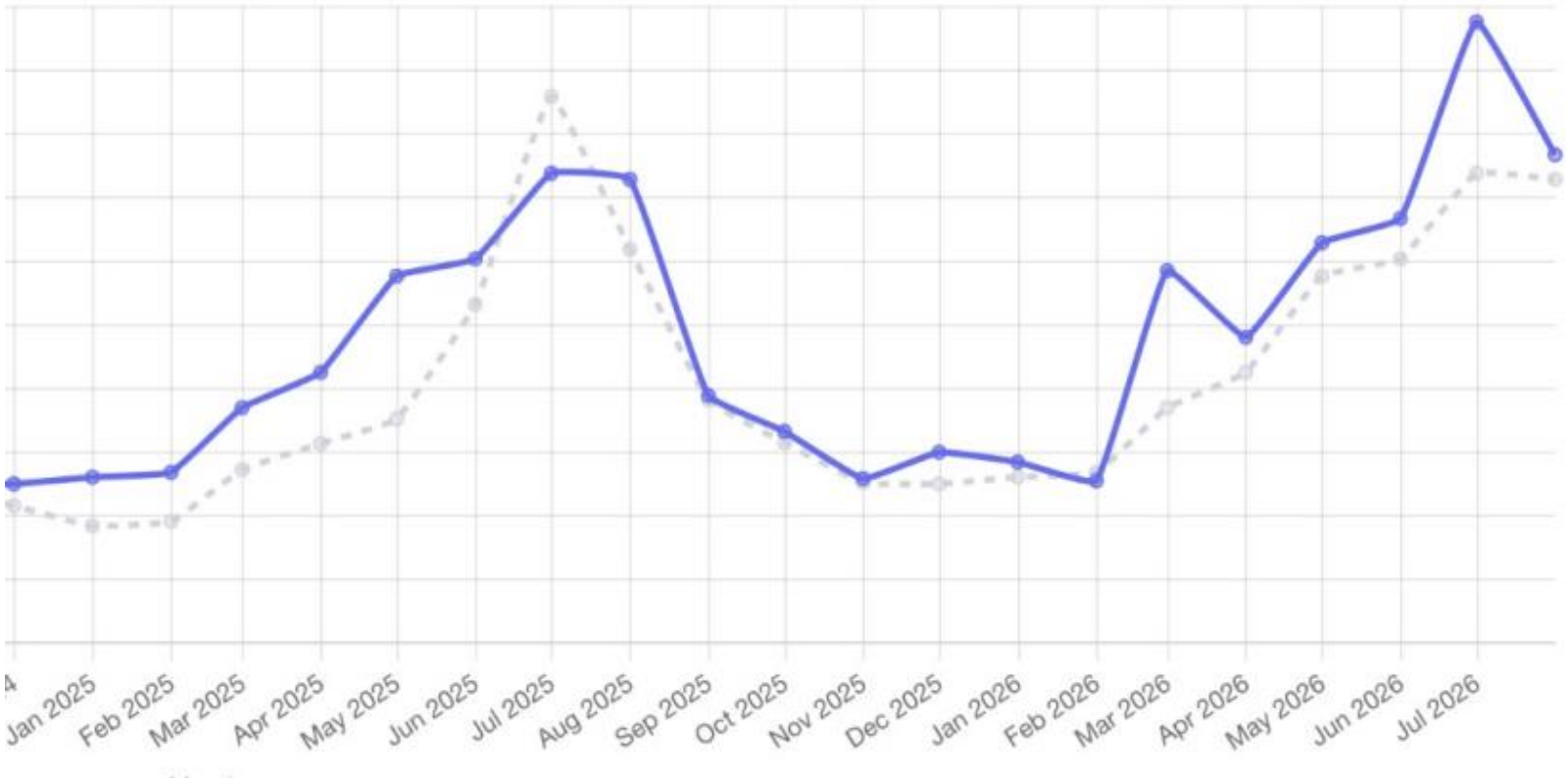
Source: SMARInsights Survey, Oct 2026

Carmel's visitor economy makes many things possible, including a viable path for affordable housing. The high value of a Carmel "room key" — $250,000 to $500,000 per hotel room — creates a rare opportunity for redeveloping lower-performing hotel properties into low-income and affordable housing **with no need for City subsidies.**



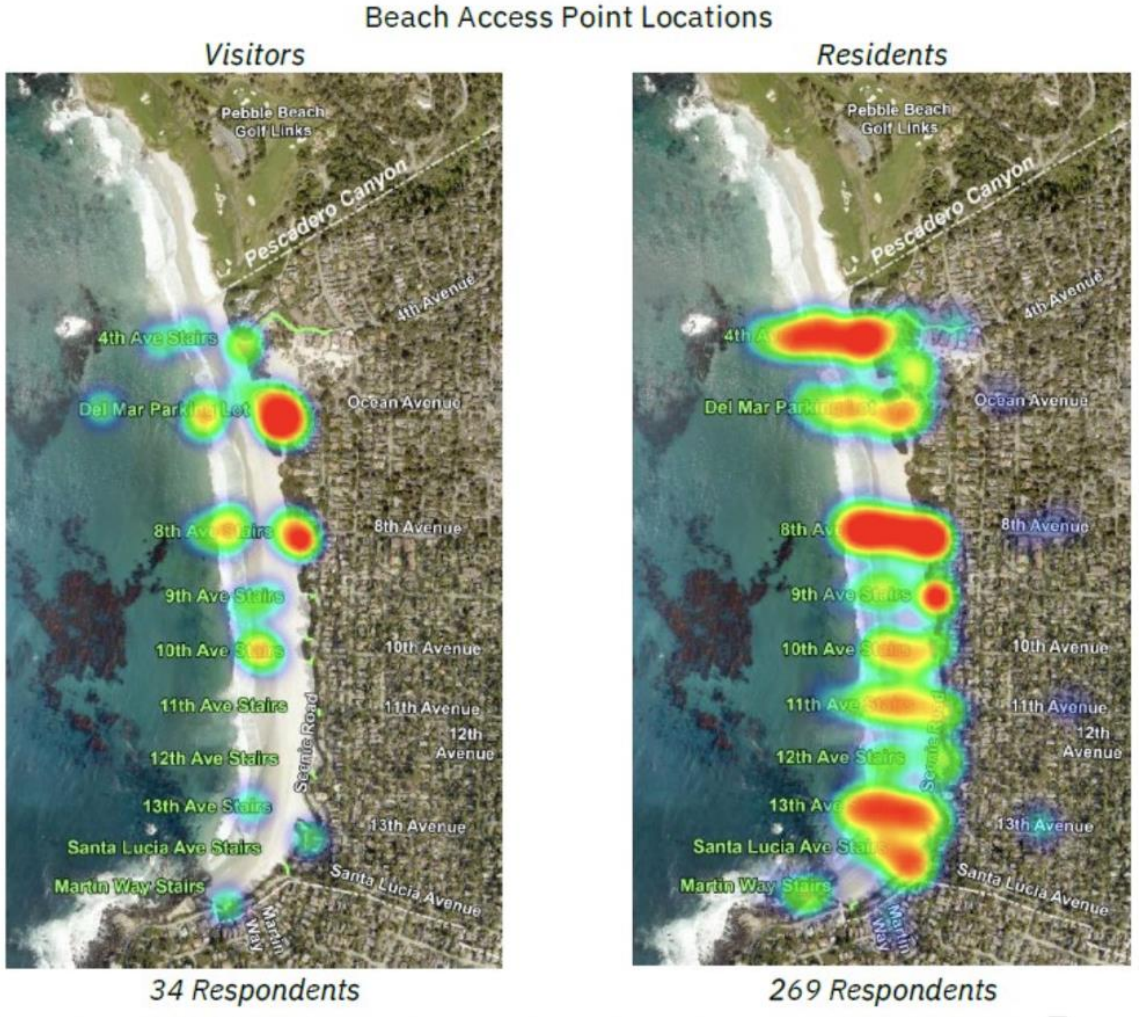
Over the past year, Carmel-by-the-Sea day visitation grew faster than overnight visitation. Likely factors include reopening of Hwy 1, spillover from FIFA World Cup events, and low-snow conditions inspiring an early increase in coastal getaways.

Day Visitation Jan 2025 to Aug 2026 (blue line) compared with previous year (dotted line)



Source: Placer.ai

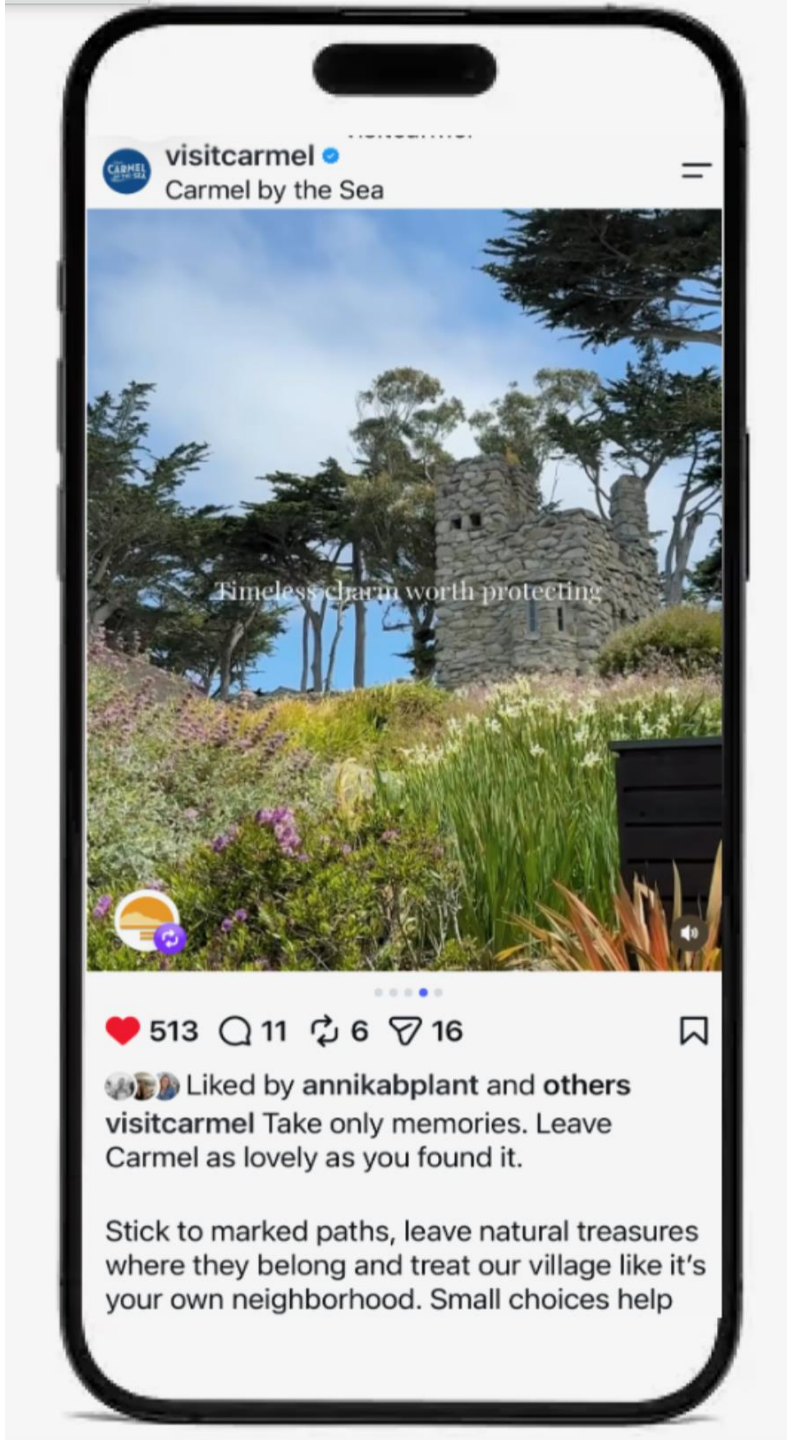
Crowding and congestion is commonly attributed to tourism, but sources of impacts may be closer to home. A complicated mix of people arrives in Carmel-by-the-Sea every day, including 300 to 500 employees, residents of nearby towns, travelers stopping in Carmel for a few hours, and overnight guests in the city or nearby. A recent study sheds light on use of beach trails.



Source: Coastal Hazards Local Coastal Program Update, Socioeconomic Analysis, Presented to the Forest & Beach Commission, Nov 13, 2025

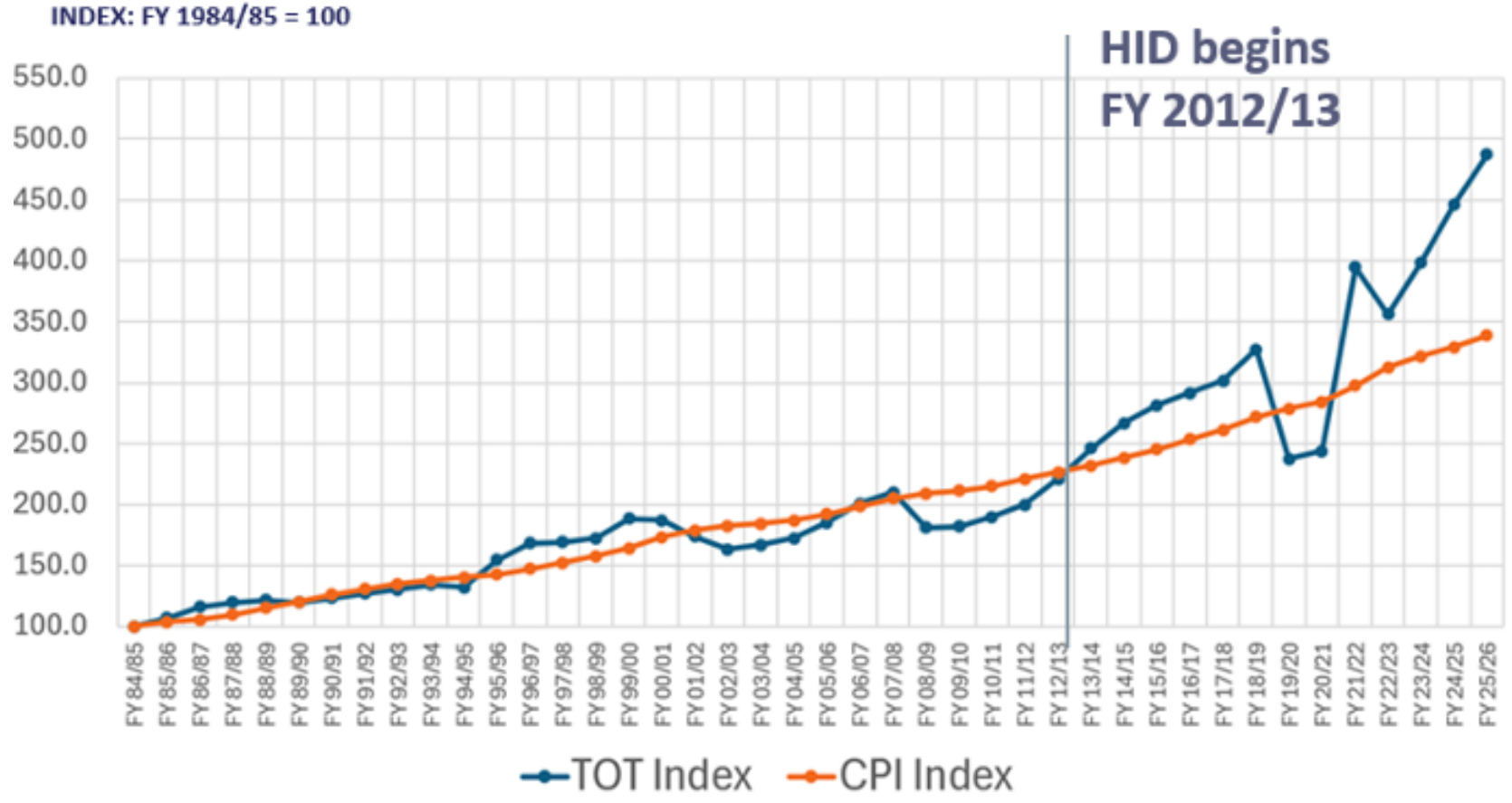
Awareness of local tourism marketing practices is low. Many point to Carmel's famous brand, high-profile media exposure, and unrelenting social media as proof that Carmel already has plenty of marketing.

Less understood is the role of targeted marketing in attracting overnight guests, driving longer stays, filling off-peak vacancies, supporting restaurants and retailers, positioning Carmel against key competitors, and educating visitors.



Innkeepers point to marketing as a key factor in more than doubling the city's TOT revenues since 2013. TOT grew by an average of 6.6% a year after lodgers imposed a 2.0% assessment on their own operations to generate more overnight visitation through Visit Carmel.

After the HID was formed, TOT grew 2.5x faster and at twice the CPI, generating an additional $26 million in City revenues.



Source: Carmel Innkeepers Association

Several residents interviewed expressed a deep distaste for the ‘Love Carmel Like a Local’ campaign and promotion of ‘fairytale’ architecture.

Many said they would be more open to Carmel-by-the-Sea marketing if it centered on authentic local culture, history, architecture, and people — and if they had a say in it.

Other Monterey County communities have more actively pursued transit solutions to ease congestion. Monterey-Salinas Transit is launching a comprehensive periodic review of countywide transit next year, creating an opportunity for new solutions to be considered for Carmel-by-the-Sea.

City of Monterey

There seems to be little awareness of growing threats. Luxury pricing that may fall short of visitor expectations. Plans for nearly 1,300 brand-new hotel rooms nearby. Major new housing developments likely to cause not only more regional traffic congestion but increased local visitation. More mega-events on the horizon.

It’s proven. Carmel-by-the-Sea can change. Witness the recent adoption of street addresses — and limits on beach fires.

‘Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif., has long guarded its eccentricities.’

New York Times, Oct. 2, 2026

The marketing needs to be more connected to who we are, not just made up.

I think we as a community have work to do. We need to build more bridges between businesses and residents and try to find a solution.

Carmel has exceeded its capacity for tourism that leaves no impacts.

It will have to be done in a Carmel sort of way.

Data? Yes please. That's where we need to start. I think we need a fact-based, data-based management plan.

Next Steps

- Finalize survey results
- Develop case studies
- Develop report and recommendations
- Present to City Council Dec. 7 or 8

Thank you

Questions?