

Carefree Town Center Competitive Retail Position Analysis

Competitive Retail Positioning, Market Context, and Strategic Direction

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Town of Carefree

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Executive Summary

The Town of Carefree retained Evolve Ventures to evaluate the **competitive market position** of its primary core retail district within the Carefree Town Center. The purpose of this work is to assess where the Town Center is positioned today, define its optimal market position, and identify actionable strategies to bridge the gap between current conditions and long-term opportunity.

This analysis is grounded in a comprehensive process that included stakeholder interviews with property owners, business operators, Town leadership, and retail market experts; a review of relevant Town-approved plans and policy documents; and Evolve Ventures' extensive experience advising retail and mixed-use destinations throughout the Metropolitan Phoenix market. Together, these inputs informed a realistic, market-based assessment of Carefree's position and its competitive potential.

Understanding Market Position

Market position—sometimes referred to as placement—describes how a product competes and differentiates itself among peers in a competitive marketplace. For a retail destination, position is defined by the product offering, target customer, price point or value proposition, accessibility, and overall experience. A clear and defensible market position is essential for attracting quality tenants, sustaining investment, and creating long-term economic resilience.

To accurately assess Carefree Town Center's position, it is necessary to understand both **internal perception**—how stakeholders believe the Town Center functions and should evolve—and **external perception**—how the broader market views Carefree today and what it believes Carefree could become. Evolve Ventures synthesized these perspectives to identify common ground and define an optimal position that balances economic potential with Carefree's established identity as a premier desert community. Preserving and elevating that identity is not a constraint; it is, in fact, central to Carefree's ability to differentiate itself and create a compelling, experience-driven retail destination.

Process and Framework

The evaluation of Carefree Town Center's current and potential market position focused on four core questions:

1. How internal stakeholders perceive the Town Center today and where they believe it should be positioned

2. How the broader regional market views Carefree and its unrealized potential
3. Who the current customer base is and how it behaves
4. What market opportunity exists to capture new and untapped customers

Based on this analysis, the report provides recommendations related to product development, tenant mix, placemaking, marketing, and public-private collaboration, including guidance on how costs, responsibilities, and benefits can be shared between the Town and private property owners.

Placemaking as a Strategic Tool

Within retail development and planning, the concept of **placemaking** is central to driving successful outcomes. In a retail context, placemaking refers to the comprehensive experience created by tenancy, building condition, supporting infrastructure, destination amenities, accessibility, visibility, and perceived value of time and money for the end user. The most successful environments are those in which businesses, landlords, and the municipality align around delivering a high-quality guest experience that benefits all parties.

Carefree's Position Today

Carefree's market position is currently in transition. Historically, Carefree functioned as a tourist-oriented destination supported by a predominantly part-time residential population. As the Phoenix metropolitan area has expanded, however, new and highly competitive retail destinations have emerged throughout North Scottsdale and the broader region. Carefree is now effectively a suburban community within a large metropolitan system—yet its Town Center has not fully adapted to compete for either local or regional demand.

While Carefree has captured some growth from nearby Phoenix and Scottsdale residents, it underperforms relative to its potential in attracting regional visitors and discretionary spending. This has resulted in a Town Center that is charming but highly seasonal, with limited evening activity and constrained reinvestment.

Foundational Strengths to Build Upon

Despite these challenges, Carefree Town Center has meaningful assets that provide a strong foundation for repositioning. These include a loyal restaurant customer base, a wellness identity anchored by Civana, destination art galleries such as Grace Renee Gallery, and authentic local experiences like the English Rose Tea Room. In addition, the Carefree Marketplace functions as a high-quality neighborhood center with a strong mix of restaurants, home goods retailers, and essential services anchored by a grocer.

Collectively, these assets create the opportunity to serve a broad target market. In practice, the Carefree Town Center functions as **two distinct but complementary product offerings**:

- **The Easy Street Core**, which has the greatest potential to evolve into an experience-driven destination environment
- **The Carefree Marketplace**, which serves as a stable neighborhood retail center focused on daily needs, home goods, and services

While these areas should be better linked through improved connectivity and wayfinding, they serve different roles and should be positioned accordingly.

Current vs. Optimal Position

Today, the Carefree Town Center is best described as a **seasonal, daytime-oriented retail environment**, with activity split between the Easy Street Core and the Carefree Marketplace, but lacking cohesion, consistent activation, and modernized real estate product.

The **optimal market position** for the Carefree Town Center is as a **year-round, patio-oriented dining and lifestyle destination rooted in the desert experience**. Wellness and desert living—core components of the Carefree brand—should be thoughtfully integrated into the Easy Street Core as complementary services and experiences that support dining, arts, and social activity. Optimal tenancy in this area emphasizes destination restaurants, experiential retail, wellness offerings, and activated public spaces.

Carefree Marketplace should continue to function as a destination for daily needs and neighborhood services, particularly as new residential development expands the local trade area. One strategic consideration explored in this report is the potential relocation of the Post Office to the former Ace Hardware space at Carefree Marketplace. While this would reduce retail square footage, it would create stronger synergy with Bashas' and surrounding services while freeing the Easy Street Core for higher-value experiential uses.

Key Areas for Improvement

To achieve its optimal position, Carefree must address several interrelated challenges:

1. **Building condition** that inhibits quality tenancy, despite Carefree's high-end residential perception
2. **Sub-optimal tenancy** in core retail areas, including low-engagement uses better suited outside the Town Center
3. **Wayfinding and signage deficiencies** that limit visibility and connectivity

4. **Pedestrian infrastructure gaps**, including the need for additional shade throughout the Town Center
5. **Limited residential presence** within the Town Center to support immediate local demand
6. **Parking perception, and management challenges**

Encouragingly, reinvestment momentum has already been demonstrated through the recent revitalization of Spanish Village, confirming that market demand exists when conditions support it.

A core strategy is the introduction of **integrated residential density within and adjacent to the Town Center** to support walkability, local businesses, and year-round activity—implemented in a manner that respects Carefree’s scale and character.

The Role of Property Owners and Partnership

The most significant missed opportunity—and the greatest potential catalyst—is the coordinated engagement of property owners in partnership with the Town of Carefree to deliver a consistently high-quality environment. This report recommends the formation of a **Business Improvement District (BID)**, the implementation of a **façade improvement program**, and a **strategic Town investment and disposition strategy** to align public and private efforts.

Integrated Strategy for Key Town Center Sites

A central implementation strategy is the coordinated use of key sites within the Town Center to enable and augment private investment. **The Town Hall site, Los Portales, and Town Mall are treated as three co-equal and interdependent levers**, each capable of advancing independently or in parallel as market demand emerges and site-specific constraints are resolved. While coordinated progress across all three sites offers the greatest cumulative impact, the strategy is intentionally flexible and does not rely on a single catalyst project. Town-owned assets, including the Town Hall site, play an important role within this framework by improving feasibility, signaling commitment, and supporting market-ready redevelopment. In addition to its enabling role, the Town Hall site represents a co-equal redevelopment opportunity capable of hosting primary destination uses that directly shape perception, activity, and economic performance within the Town Center.

Purpose of This Report

The following document expands upon these findings in greater detail. It is intended to provide perspective, establish a shared understanding of market realities, and open constructive dialogue among property owners, businesses, and the Town as Carefree

considers its next chapter. The goal is not to prescribe a single outcome, but to support informed decision-making that positions Carefree Town Center for long-term vitality, differentiation, and success.

This analysis and included recommendations are intended to maximize the competitive position of Carefree as a destination retail environment in a highly competitive marketplace. Certain recommendations may appear to push resource limits or challenge existing assumptions. However, this work is offered solely as a focused business perspective to support informed future discussion and decision-making, not to contradict or challenge existing policy directions.

1. Position Of the Town Center

The Town Center is envisioned as a vibrant, walkable district centered on wellness, arts, high-quality dining, and best-in-class placemaking. While Carefree has multiple commercial nodes, revitalization success depends on prioritizing those parcels with the greatest potential to reshape perception, improve experience, and catalyze private investment.

Revitalization success depends on coordinated action across multiple, equally important parcels within the Town Center. **Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall function as three catalyst levers**, each capable of hosting meaningful redevelopment outcomes and each able to advance independently or in parallel as feasibility, ownership alignment, and market demand allow. Collectively, these sites provide the Town with multiple pathways to momentum rather than a single, sequential dependency.

1.1 Easy Street Area / Core

The pedestrian heart of Carefree, encompassing **Town Hall, Los Portales, Town Mall, the Post Office building, 11 East Sundial and surrounding courtyards and plazas**. Together, these properties form the Town's most visible and influential opportunity to establish a cohesive, experience-driven district. **Los Portales and Town Mall function as complementary anchors within the Easy Street Core, and the long-term success of the Town Center depends on their coordinated repositioning.**

1.1.a Town Hall Parcels (*Town-owned land and facilities*)

Strategic Role

Town Hall parcels represent the Town's strongest **implementation lever** and a critical complement to Town Mall/Los Portales redevelopment, particularly for parking, civic presence, and demonstration of public commitment. They also provide a redevelopment opportunity with the potential to host destination hospitality, dining, and mixed-use programs that directly contribute to Town Center activation.

Current Advantages

- **Public control:** Eliminates ownership barriers.

- **Highly visible location:** Adjacent to Easy Street, Gardens, Pavilion, and public parking.
- **Parking capacity:** Underutilized land can address district-wide parking constraints.
- **Alignment with stakeholder vision:** Frequently identified as appropriate for mixed-use, cultural, or dining-oriented development.
- **Cave Creek Road frontage:** Direct frontage on Cave Creek Road, providing high visibility, strong vehicular exposure, and an opportunity to reinforce arrival into the Town Center

Current Disadvantages

- **Political sensitivity:** Redevelopment of Town land requires careful stewardship.
- **Undefined program:** No adopted concept or feasibility framework.
- **Infrastructure investment required:** Public funding or partnerships will be necessary.

Recommended Strategy

Town Hall is the most controllable opportunity and an ideal site to support Town Mall/Los Portales redevelopment through parking solutions, public realm investment, and catalytic mixed-use development. It is acknowledged that the Town Mall property has significant obstacles to redevelopment.

The recommended strategy assumes **clearing the existing Town Hall site** to maximize flexibility and long-term value. Once cleared, the Town should evaluate multiple reuse scenarios.

The Town should relocate its municipal offices to the **office portion of 11 East Sundial**, consolidating administrative functions in an existing commercial building while removing civic office uses from the Easy Street Core. This approach allows the Town to meet its operational needs without consuming prime Town Center frontage better suited for hospitality, dining, and retail activation.

Preferred Long-Term Program

The preferred long-term redevelopment program for the Town Hall site is a mixed-use destination anchored by hospitality, restaurant, and specialty retail uses, supported by integrated parking and public-realm improvements as necessary. This site should function as a visible catalytic project that reinforces Carefree’s identity as a boutique, experience-driven desert village.

Interim uses, including surface parking, may be appropriate in the near term to support adjacent redevelopment. However, these uses should be viewed strictly as transitional strategies and not as the ultimate vision for the site.

Status Takeaway

This site represents a critical and independent opportunity within the Easy Street Core. While its impact is amplified when advanced in coordination with Town Mall and Los Portales, **progress may occur independently as obstacles are resolved and market demand materializes.**

1.1.b Los Portales *(Privately owned; located along Easy Street)*

Strategic Role

Los Portales is of significant importance to the success of the Easy Street Core and serves as a defining frontage along Carefree’s primary pedestrian corridor. Alongside successful energy at adjacent Easy Street buildings, and coupled with the opportunity at the Town Hall site and potentially at the Town Mall, Los Portales is essential to establishing continuity, energy, and destination appeal within the Town Center. **Meaningful repositioning of the Easy Street Core requires progress at all three sites, whether achieved concurrently or through coordinated phasing.**

Current Advantages

- **Prominent Easy Street frontage:** Highly visible within the pedestrian network and central to the Easy Street experience.
- **Flexible building footprint:** Capable of accommodating dining, creative, or hybrid experiential uses aligned with Carefree’s desired positioning.
- **Residual brand equity:** Frequently cited as a former anchor with lingering community recognition and emotional connection.
- **Potential for new redevelopment opportunities:** In the event of new ownership or new infusion of capital, there could be significant opportunities to redevelop and re-tenant this space.

Current Disadvantages

- **Physical obsolescence:** Significant capital investment required to meet modern tenant and guest expectations.

- **Ownership complexity:** Alignment with Town objectives and broader district strategy will be necessary to advance reinvestment.
- **Feasibility challenges:** Market rents alone may not support reinvestment without complementary public-realm improvements and coordinated district action.
- **Undefined program:** Lack of a clear tenanting and placemaking strategy limits near-term momentum.

Status Takeaway

This site represents a critical and independent opportunity within the Easy Street Core. Redevelopment opportunities could allow for a significant infusion of new and complementary tenants and uses that align with the Town’s goals and vision. While its impact is amplified when advanced in coordination with Town Hall and the Town Mall, **progress may occur independently as obstacles are resolved and market demand materializes.**

1.1.c Town Mall *(Multi-owner retail area including the Post Office property)*

Strategic Role

Town Mall is a central and highly visible component of the Easy Street Core and plays a critical role in shaping first impressions of the Town Center. Along with Los Portales, it represents a foundational opportunity to redefine the quality, experience, and economic performance of the pedestrian core. Town Mall, Los Portales, and the Town Hall site together form a contiguous set of opportunity sites within the Easy Street Core. While coordinated progress across all three sites offers the greatest cumulative impact, **each site may advance independently based on readiness, ownership conditions, and market interest—without diminishing its strategic importance to the Town Center as a whole.**

Current Advantages

- **Central location:** Town Mall sits directly within the pedestrian core and functions as a crossroads between Easy Street, Town Hall, public parking, and civic amenities.
- **Consistent daily use:** The Post Office and service-oriented tenants generate reliable foot traffic, making this one of the most frequently visited areas in Town.
- **Scale and frontage:** The site offers sufficient size and visibility to support meaningful placemaking, dining, and mixed-use concepts.

- **Phasing potential:** Redevelopment could occur incrementally, allowing portions of the site to remain active during transition.

Current Disadvantages

- **Visually unattractive environment:** Aging buildings, inward-facing layouts, and weak façades undermine Carefree’s desired upscale, curated identity.
- **Sub-optimal tenant mix:** Office and service uses stabilize occupancy but limit reinvestment and suppress experiential uses.
- **Fragmented ownership:** Multiple owners complicate coordination and timing of improvements.
- **Underutilized civic role:** Despite heavy use, the site does not encourage lingering, social activity, or connection to adjacent assets.

Post Office Relocation Opportunity

A key strategic opportunity is the **relocation of the Post Office to vacant or underutilized space at the Bashas’ Center**. This move would:

- Preserve essential postal services in a convenient, parking-rich location
- Activate vacant space at the Bashas’ Center
- Remove a use that constrains higher-value experiential redevelopment within the Easy Street Core
- Create greater flexibility for Town Mall to evolve toward dining, placemaking, and mixed-use outcomes

At this time, there is no confirmed information regarding the **current rent, lease term, or renewal provisions** of the Post Office. Access to this information would materially improve evaluation of relocation timing, feasibility, and financial implications and is recommended prior to advancing further analysis.

Status Takeaway

This site represents a critical and independent opportunity within the Easy Street Core. While its impact is amplified when advanced in coordination with Los Portales, and the Town Hall site, **progress may occur independently as obstacles are resolved and market demand materializes.**

1.2 Bashas' Center

A stable, neighborhood-serving retail center that plays a critical support role but is not intended as a Town Center catalyst.

1.2.a Bashas' Center (*Neighborhood retail center anchored by Bashas'; located along Carefree Drive*)

Strategic Role

The Bashas' Center functions as Carefree's primary daily-needs retail hub. Its most significant strategic opportunity is to **support Town Center revitalization**, including potential accommodation of relocated civic or service uses.

Current Advantages

- Strong grocery anchor with consistent traffic
- Stable tenancy and fewer vacancies
- Adequate parking supply
- Alignment with resident-serving needs

Current Disadvantages

- Dated, utilitarian appearance
- No placemaking or experiential draw
- Limited suitability for destination dining or nightlife
- Minimal connection to Town Center identity

Post Office Relocation Opportunity

Relocating the Post Office to the Bashas' Center would:

- Fill vacant space with a reliable daily-use tenant
- Leverage existing parking and access
- Strengthen the center's neighborhood-serving role
- Enable redevelopment of Town Mall

At this time, there is no confirmed information regarding the **current rent, lease term, or renewal provisions** of the Post Office. Access to this information would materially improve

evaluation of relocation timing, feasibility, and financial implications and is recommended prior to advancing further analysis.

Status Takeaway

Bashas' Center provides essential infrastructure but is not a catalyst. Its value lies in stability, convenience, and its ability to **absorb uses that unlock higher-value redevelopment elsewhere.**

Comparative Role Summary

Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall → Co-Equal Catalyst Sites

Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall are three co-equal catalyst sites within the Town Center. Each serves a distinct role—Los Portales as a defining Easy Street frontage, Town Hall as a highly visible mixed-use opportunity, and Town Mall as a central pedestrian anchor—but none is subordinate to another. While coordinated advancement across all three sites offers the greatest district-wide benefit, **each site can also move forward independently as market conditions, ownership alignment, and feasibility constraints allow.**

Carefree Marketplace → Stable Support Node

Carefree Marketplace functions as a complementary, neighborhood-serving component of the Town Center, providing stability and absorbing uses that enable higher-value experiential redevelopment elsewhere.

Key Strategic Implication

Achieving Carefree's optimal Town Center position does not depend on a single catalyst project. Instead, it relies on maintaining momentum across **multiple co-equal sites**, allowing Town Mall, Los Portales, and the Town Hall site to advance **together or independently** as conditions allow. This flexible, multi-path approach reduces risk, responds to market demand, and increases the likelihood of near- and mid-term success.

2. Research on Market Position

2.1 Stakeholder Input Themes

2.1.a Introductory Summary

This analysis was informed by:

- Extensive stakeholder interviews with property owners, tenants, business operators, real estate experts, Town leadership, and outside investors
- Review of Town planning documents, signage and circulation studies, and prior redevelopment concepts
- Assessment of the existing tenant mix, retail categories, and alignment with contemporary merchandising strategies
- Market data analysis, including rent trends, demographics, and performance of competitive districts
- Developer and investor input related to feasibility, capital attraction, and long-term opportunity

Together, these inputs provide a clear understanding of Carefree’s strengths, constraints, and strategic opportunities.

2.1.b Key Stakeholder Themes

- Strong desire for activation, shade, pedestrian comfort, and unified branding
- Need to rebalance the tenant mix toward experiential, lifestyle, and dining uses
- Fragmented ownership and aging buildings hinder reinvestment
- Seasonal fluctuations reduce weekday and offseason performance
- Public–private partnership structures are essential for transformation

2.1.c Desire for Activation, Shade, Pedestrian Comfort, and Unified Branding

What Stakeholders Are Saying

Across nearly all interviews, stakeholders emphasized that Carefree’s Town Center lacks pedestrian clarity, comfort, and continuity—particularly outside of special events. While Easy Street and the Gardens are valued, they do not, on their own, encourage lingering, repeat visits, or evening activity.

Stakeholders consistently cited:

- Insufficient shade, especially during warmer months
- Disjointed lighting, signage, and storefront presentation
- Lack of visual cues signaling a unified district or clear “arrival”
- Pedestrian discomfort between destinations, discouraging walking
- Confusing vehicular and parking wayfinding

Several stakeholders noted that Carefree *appears* walkable but does not feel cohesive or intuitive once visitors arrive.

Why This Matters

Pedestrian comfort is not an aesthetic issue—it directly affects revenue. Without shade, lighting, and continuity, visitors:

- Shorten their stays
- Avoid walking between businesses
- Skip evening dining or second stops

The absence of unified branding also weakens Carefree’s ability to clearly communicate what it is today and what it aspires to become, reinforcing confusion between a tourist stop, arts enclave, and lifestyle village.

Strategic Implication

Incremental improvements—shade, lighting, wayfinding, and coordinated streetscape standards—would have an outsized impact and can be implemented relatively quickly through public–private collaboration, without requiring full redevelopment.

2.1.d Need to Rebalance the Tenant Mix Toward Experiential, Lifestyle, and Dining Uses

What Stakeholders Are Saying

Stakeholders overwhelmingly agree that Carefree’s current tenant mix is too passive and hobbyist-driven to support a vibrant Town Center.

Key concerns include:

- Overreliance on galleries and low-activity retail
- Limited dining diversity and few true destination restaurants
- Lack of evening and social uses
- Businesses that close early or seasonally

Restaurants are consistently identified as “mini-anchors”—the uses most capable of generating sustained foot traffic and supporting adjacent retail.

Why This Matters

Carefree’s small permanent population means retail alone cannot generate sufficient activity. Authentic, engaged and experiential uses—dining, specialty food, wellness, and cultural programming—are essential to:

- Extend length of stay
- Encourage repeat visitation
- Activate evenings and shoulder seasons

Without these uses, Carefree risks remaining a “one-and-done” destination rather than a place people return to regularly.

Strategic Implication

Rebalancing does not mean abandoning arts or retail; it means integrating them into an experience-led ecosystem where dining, events, and lifestyle uses create consistent energy that benefits all tenants.

2.1.e Fragmented Ownership and Aging Buildings Hinder Reinvestment

What Stakeholders Are Saying

A dominant theme is that economic obsolescence—not lack of interest—is holding Carefree back.

Stakeholders cited:

- Aging building stock that no longer meets modern tenant expectations
- Fragmented ownership that prevents coordinated upgrades
- Market rents that do not justify reinvestment costs
- Resistance from some long-term owners to change or collaboration

Several participants noted that even motivated owners struggle to make upgrades “pencil” under current conditions.

Why This Matters

This creates a self-reinforcing cycle:

1. Outdated buildings limit tenant quality
2. Lower-quality tenants cap rents
3. Low rents prevent reinvestment
4. Lack of reinvestment reinforces decline

Without intervention, the private market alone is unlikely to reverse this trend, particularly in key Town Center parcels.

Strategic Implication

Breaking this cycle requires new tools—overlay zoning, incentives, shared standards, and public–private investment—to change project economics and encourage reinvestment where it would not otherwise occur.

2.1.f Seasonal Fluctuations Reduce Weekday and Offseason Performance

What Stakeholders Are Saying

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that Carefree is highly seasonal, with notable drops in activity during summer months and midweek periods.

Issues cited include:

- Businesses closing or reducing hours during summer
- Heavy reliance on winter visitors and event days
- Limited everyday reasons for locals to visit

Several stakeholders cautioned that event-driven spikes do not translate into sustained economic health and may disrupt core businesses.

Why This Matters

Seasonality undermines:

- Tenant stability
- Investor confidence
- Year-round employment
- Recruitment of destination operators

It also reinforces Carefree's image as a part-time town rather than a consistent lifestyle destination.

Strategic Implication

Reducing seasonality requires everyday uses, programmed activity, and experiences that appeal to locals and regional visitors—not just tourists or annual events.

2.1.g Public–Private Partnership Structures Are Essential for Transformation

What Stakeholders Are Saying

There is broad consensus that neither the Town nor the private sector can address these challenges independently.

Stakeholders repeatedly referenced:

- The need for a Business Improvement District (BID)
- Overlay zoning or infill incentive districts
- Public participation in parking, infrastructure, and placemaking
- Private-sector leadership in tenant curation and maintenance

Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of clearly defining roles between the Town and property owners.

Why This Matters

Carefree’s challenges are not rooted in vision, but in implementation. Public–private partnerships provide:

- Risk sharing
- Capital leverage
- Coordinated standards
- Long-term stewardship

Without these structures, progress remains incremental and vulnerable to political or ownership changes.

Strategic Implication

Successful transformation will require formalized collaboration, clear incentives, and mutually agreed-upon standards that align public investment with private commitment.

2.1.h Synthesis: Why These Themes Are Interconnected

These themes reinforce one another:

- Poor pedestrian comfort limits activation
- Weak activation undermines experiential tenants
- Aging buildings prevent tenant upgrades
- Seasonality erodes business viability
- Lack of partnership tools stalls solutions

Addressing any one issue in isolation will have limited impact. Addressing them together creates a realistic pathway from vision to execution.

3. Current Position Analysis

This section evaluates Carefree’s current market position relative to its competitive set, identifies where it fits today, and summarizes how it is perceived by tenants, investors, and developers. Together, these perspectives explain why Carefree has strong latent potential but continues to underperform economically.

3.1 Competitive Environment

Carefree operates within a highly competitive regional context where consumers, tenants, and capital have abundant alternatives. The Town is not competing in a vacuum; it is competing against districts that are newer, denser, and often more coordinated.

3.1.a North Scottsdale Lifestyle Centers

Examples include large-format lifestyle and power centers offering national and regional brands, strong dining lineups, ample parking, and highly curated environments.

Competitive Strengths

- High visibility and accessibility
- Dense tenant mix with strong brand recognition
- Concentration of destination dining and entertainment
- Predictable customer volumes and long operating hours

Carefree’s Relative Position

Carefree cannot and should not compete on scale, tenant count, or national brand depth. These centers win on convenience and volume but lack the intimacy, authenticity, and sense of place Carefree can offer.

3.1.b Mixed-Use Districts with Contemporary Retail and Hospitality

These include newer mixed-use developments combining retail, dining, residential, office, and hospitality in walkable, master-planned environments.

Competitive Strengths

- Modern building stock and infrastructure
- Higher residential density supporting daily activity
- Integrated parking and pedestrian networks
- Clear branding and cohesive identity

Carefree's Relative Position

Carefree lacks comparable density and modern infrastructure, which limits direct competition. However, Carefree's smaller scale, natural setting, and non-master-planned character offer a differentiated alternative for visitors seeking a calmer, more personal experience.

3.1.c Regional Dining and Entertainment Destinations

These destinations attract visitors specifically for food, nightlife, and social activity, often extending into evenings and weekends.

Competitive Strengths

- Strong cluster effect among restaurants and bars
- Evening and nighttime energy
- Frequent media and social visibility
- Clear reason to visit beyond shopping

Carefree's Relative Position

Carefree currently underperforms in dining depth and evening activity, limiting its ability to capture discretionary spending. However, its environment is well suited to a refined, patio-oriented, experience-driven dining niche rather than high-energy nightlife.

3.1.d Boutique Hospitality Markets in the Greater Phoenix Region

These include resort-adjacent villages, small destination towns, and boutique hospitality clusters offering curated experiences.

Competitive Strengths

- Clear identity and storytelling

- Strong connection between lodging, dining, and public space
- High-quality design and amenities
- Visitors primed to explore and spend

Carefree's Relative Position

Carefree has comparable character and setting, but lacks a signature hospitality or cultural anchor that consistently draws visitors into the Town Center; even highly successful nearby destinations such as Civana demonstrate the challenge, as many guests remain largely on-property rather than engaging the Town.

3.2 Where Carefree Fits Today

Carefree occupies a distinct but underleveraged position in the regional marketplace.

3.2.a Existing Strengths

Carefree benefits from several foundational assets:

- **Authentic desert setting:** Natural beauty and gardens provide a sense of escape.
- **Human-scale, walkable form:** Plazas and courtyards encourage strolling and informal gathering.
- **Arts and wellness identity:** Long-standing association with creative and wellness-oriented uses.
- **Affluent customer base:** High-income residents, seasonal visitors, and nearby North Scottsdale households.

These attributes align well with contemporary demand for experiential, place-based environments.

3.2.b Structural Constraints

Despite these strengths, Carefree's performance is limited by:

- **Aging and obsolete buildings** that do not meet modern tenant expectations
- **Inconsistent signage and wayfinding** that weaken arrival and orientation
- **Fragmented ownership** that prevents coordinated reinvestment

- **Lower-density development patterns** that constrain economics for mixed-use projects
- **Limited evening activity**, reinforcing a daytime-only perception

These constraints suppress rents, deter reinvestment, and perpetuate a cycle of underperformance.

3.2.c Net Position Today

Carefree sits between two identities:

- More refined and authentic than suburban retail centers
- Less activated, dense, and cohesive than successful mixed-use districts

As a result, Carefree is often viewed as charming but incomplete—a place people enjoy briefly rather than choose intentionally.

3.3 Perceived Market Position

How Carefree is perceived by market participants directly influences leasing, investment, and redevelopment outcomes.

3.3.a Perception by Tenants

Tenants generally view Carefree as:

- A charming district with untapped potential
- Attractive for boutique and owner-operated concepts
- Constrained by outdated spaces and inconsistent foot traffic

Primary concerns include:

- Limited modern restaurant-ready spaces
- Uncertainty around parking and wayfinding
- Seasonal fluctuations affecting revenue stability

Implication: Tenants are interested, but only at rents and scales that limit reinvestment.

3.3.b Perception by Investors

Investors recognize Carefree's long-term appeal but remain cautious.

Common perceptions include:

- Strong demographics and setting
- Lack of clear redevelopment pathways
- Absence of a visible, coordinated anchor redevelopment effort
- Uncertainty about coordination among owners and the Town

Implication: Capital is patient but hesitant; most investors are waiting for proof of momentum and public commitment.

3.3.c Perception by Developers

Developers consistently cite feasibility challenges.

Key themes include:

- **Insufficient population density** to support conventional mixed-use economics
- **Absorption risk**, particularly for retail and dining
- **Parking constraints** limiting intensity and layout flexibility
- **Zoning rigidity**, reducing the ability to close feasibility gaps

Implication: Developers are not opposed to Carefree, but require public partnership, zoning flexibility, and infrastructure solutions to make projects viable.

3.4 Strategic Interpretation

Carefree's current position is not one of failure, but of **misalignment**:

- Market demand exists, but product does not match expectations
- Interest exists, but economics do not yet pencil
- Vision exists, but implementation tools are incomplete

- New ownership and investment could serve as a change agent to redevelop critical properties and encourage new tenants and uses

This positioning explains why incremental improvements alone have not shifted outcomes—and why coordinated anchor redevelopment within the Easy Street Core, coordinated public investment, and partnership structures are necessary to move Carefree from potential to performance.

4. Optimal Position Analysis

This section defines where Carefree can compete most effectively, based on market realities, stakeholder input, and regional context. The goal is not to chase scale or volume, but to clearly articulate Carefree’s niche and align future decisions around it.

4.1 Statement of Optimal Competitive Position

Carefree’s optimal competitive position is as a **boutique, wellness-driven, hospitality-supported destination** with curated dining and specialty retail—designed for **year-round appeal, high-quality experiences, and long-term economic resilience**.

Carefree succeeds by offering a refined alternative to larger, busier districts—not by competing directly with them.

4.1.a Carefree’s Niche

“An Elegant Desert Village for Relaxed, Curated Living”

Carefree’s competitive advantage is not scale, nightlife, or national retail depth. It is the combination of:

- Affluent demographics
- Authentic small-town character
- Desert setting, gardens, and open space
- Proximity to North Scottsdale without its intensity

Stakeholders consistently describe Carefree as a place people choose to **slow down**, not speed up. Carefree offers a refined, walkable desert village experience—where dining, art, wellness, and social life feel curated, calm, and personal rather than crowded or commercial.

4.1.b Competitive Context: Where Carefree Wins (and Where It Should Not Compete)

Carefree Should Not Compete On

- Tenant count or retail depth (North Scottsdale lifestyle centers dominate)
- High-energy nightlife or bar scenes (regional entertainment districts win)
- Large-scale, master-planned mixed-use environments
- Full-service resort amenities delivered entirely on-site

Carefree Can Win On

- Authenticity and intimacy
- Quality over quantity
- Calm, shaded, walkable environments
- Local ownership and curated offerings
- A refined, experiential alternative to Scottsdale’s busier destinations

Strategic clarity about what Carefree is *not* trying to be is essential to avoid diluted outcomes.

4.1.c Target Customer Segments

Carefree’s positioning aligns with clearly defined primary and secondary audiences.

Primary Target

Affluent North Scottsdale Residents

- Age 45+
- High discretionary income
- Already dining out frequently—but rarely in Carefree
- Seeking quality, patios, atmosphere, and something “different” from Kierland or Scottsdale Quarter

Secondary Targets

- **Boutique Hospitality Guests:** Wellness-, spa-, and design-oriented travelers staying nearby but not regularly entering Town
 - **Seasonal Residents:** Winter visitors willing to spend locally when the experience justifies it
 - **Local Full-Time Residents:** Seeking everyday quality, dining, and social gathering—not just events
-

4.1.d The Experience Gap (Why Carefree Underperforms Today)

Stakeholders consistently point to the same limiting factors:

- Inconsistent pedestrian comfort (shade, lighting, wayfinding)
- Aging buildings that constrain tenant quality
- Too many low-energy, daytime-only uses
- Fragmented ownership and lack of shared standards
- Overreliance on seasonal events rather than everyday reasons to visit

Resulting Condition

Carefree experiences leakage: visitors pass through or visit once, but do not linger, return frequently, or recommend it as a destination.

4.1.e Core Experience Requirements

To compete credibly, Carefree must consistently deliver the following experience components. These are not optional—they function as the district’s operating system.

a. Comfort First

Shade, seating, lighting, and walkability that support year-round use.

b. Destination Dining as Mini-Anchors

Restaurants and specialty food as primary traffic drivers (local homespun version of an Eataly, for example).

c. A Cohesive Public Realm

Unified signage, wayfinding, streetscape, and lighting across the Town Center.

d. Curated, Not Crowded

Fewer tenants, higher quality, clear standards.

e. Evening and Social Energy

Patios, dining, music, and cultural programming after 5pm.

f. Modernized Building Stock

Updated façades, interiors, and infrastructure.

g. A Clear Brand Story

Elegant, desert-rooted, local, relaxed—not event-dependent or tourist-driven.

h. Everyday Reasons to Visit

Experiences that draw repeat weekly visits, not just festivals.

i. Public–Private Coordination

Public investment in infrastructure; private leadership on tenants and operations.

j. A Visible First-Mover Project

One or more visible anchor redevelopment efforts within the Easy Street Core—across **Town Hall, Los Portales, and/or Town Mall**—that signal change, quality, and market momentum. While coordinated progress across multiple sites offers the greatest cumulative impact, **any one site may serve as an initial first mover** as feasibility, ownership alignment, and market demand allow.

k. Integrated Residential Density

Integrated residential density should be prioritized on the **existing parking lot east of the proposed new Town Hall or at the southwest corner of Cave Creek Road and Bloody Basin Road**, allowing new residents to directly support the Town Center while preserving the most visible Easy Street frontages for hospitality, dining, and retail uses. A permanent parking solution for the area will need to be determined.

Residential development is intentionally excluded from the Easy Street Core and primary pedestrian frontages, which are reserved for hospitality, dining, retail, and civic activation.

Definition – Integrated Residential Density

For purposes of this strategy, integrated residential density refers to well-designed residential development located within or immediately adjacent to the Town Center, typically in mixed-use or upper-story configurations. The intent is to add a critical mass of residents to support walkability, dining, and year-round activity while maintaining Carefree’s scale, character, and quality standards.

4.1.f Strategic Implications

- **Carefree must stop competing accidentally.**
Without a clearly defined lane, it loses by default to every nearby submarket.
- **The goal is better experiences, not more people.**
Length of stay, repeat visits, and spending per visit matter more than raw foot traffic.
- **Transformation requires structure, not aspiration.**
Overlay zoning, incentives, shared standards, and public–private frameworks are required to move from vision to execution.

4.1.g What Success Looks Like

- North Scottsdale residents choose Carefree for dinner
- Resort guests leave their properties to explore the Town Center
- Businesses stay open later—and year-round
- Property owners reinvest because the economics support quality
- Carefree is known for being distinct, not compared

4.2 Market Differentiators

- High-desert environment and natural beauty
- Walkable, intimate plazas and courtyards
- Strong arts, wellness, and cultural identity
- Affluent, high-spending customer base
- Opportunity for best-in-class experiential retail and dining
- Clear differentiation from suburban commercial districts

4.3 Optimal Tenant Mix & Market Orientation

Target Merchandising Mix

Category	Target Share	Strategic Role
Food & Beverage	30–40%	Evening and weekend activation
Specialty Retail	20–30%	Identity and tourism appeal
Wellness	10–15%	Repeat local traffic
Entertainment / Hospitality	10–20%	Cultural and economic impact
Essential Services	Optimized	Supports daily needs without using prime frontage

District Orientation

- **Easy Street Core (within the Town Center):** Dining, experiential retail, wellness, hospitality, activated public space
- **Bashas' Center:** Neighborhood retail, home décor, essential services

4.4 Strategic Direction: Build Upon, Reduce, and Add

Build Upon

- Wellness and hospitality positioning
- Local business identity
- Outdoor dining and shaded pedestrian environments

Reduce

- Low-intensity service uses in high-visibility locations
- Outdated façades and fragmented tenancing

Add

- Consistent signage and branding
- Evening and offseason programming
- Enhanced public-realm amenities
- Dining, entertainment, unique anchor tenants (specialty grocer) and appropriately scaled residential density

5. Obstacles and Opportunities

This section summarizes the primary structural obstacles limiting Town Center performance and the most actionable opportunities to overcome them. While Carefree faces multiple challenges, they are interrelated and solvable through coordinated, district-scale action—particularly if focused on the coordinated repositioning of the Easy Street Core anchor sites.

5.1 Core Obstacles to Reinvestment

Carefree’s underperformance is driven less by lack of demand than by structural constraints that suppress reinvestment and activation. The following real estate and market constraints come into play:

- **Fragmented ownership** limits coordinated upgrades and shared solutions
- **Aging commercial buildings** do not meet modern tenant expectations
- **Low-density development patterns** constrain redevelopment feasibility
- **Parking perception and management issues** limit intensity, especially for dining and mixed-use

These constraints reinforce a cycle of low rents, limited reinvestment, and passive tenant mix.

5.2 Priority Redevelopment Opportunities

Not all sites play the same role in achieving district-wide success. Focusing on the parcels with the greatest collective impact on perception, experience, and feasibility is essential.

5.2.a Town Hall Parcels — Public Catalyst and Infrastructure Enabler

Catalyst site within the Easy Street Core

The Town Hall land plays a critical enabling role in the successful repositioning of the Easy Street Core. Success should be measured by improved feasibility, visible reinvestment momentum, and increased private-sector confidence within the Easy Street Core. Long-

term redevelopment of the Town Hall site should prioritize hospitality, dining, and retail uses that generate sustained visitation, evening activity, and economic impact—rather than stand-alone civic or parking-only outcomes.

- **Under Town control**, allowing for coordinated and timely action
- **Best suited for district parking, access improvements, and public-realm investment**
- **Ideal location to demonstrate public commitment** and support reinvestment within the Easy Street Core

Town Hall investment should function as a **public catalyst**—demonstrating commitment, reducing risk, and improving feasibility for adjacent private redevelopment—rather than serving as a stand-alone development project. Strategic actions at Town Hall should clearly signal market readiness and establish the infrastructure, parking, and public-realm improvements necessary to unlock reinvestment at Los Portales and Town Mall.

The recommended strategy assumes **clearing the existing Town Hall site** to maximize flexibility and long-term value. Once cleared, the Town should evaluate multiple reuse scenarios, including:

- **Interim surface parking** to support near-term redevelopment and activation of Los Portales and/or Town Mall
- **Integrated residential density development**, pursued in partnership with a qualified private developer, leveraging proximity to nearby hospitality uses and reinforcing the Town Center’s walkability
- **Relocation of Town offices**, including consideration of **Town acquisition of 11 Sundial Circle**, which could be repurposed to accommodate municipal functions and free the Town Hall parcel for higher-impact uses

These options are not mutually exclusive and may be pursued through phased implementation.

5.2.b Los Portales — Easy Street Core Anchor Site

Catalyst site within the Easy Street Core

Los Portales is a highly visible and strategically important component of the Easy Street Core and is co-equal in long-term importance to Town Mall and the Town Hall site. Its

successful repositioning is essential to creating continuity, activation, and destination appeal along Easy Street.

- **High visibility and frontage** along Easy Street
- **Opportunity for dining, experiential retail, and creative uses** aligned with Carefree’s desired positioning
- **Significant reinvestment potential** to elevate the quality and character of the pedestrian core

While reinvestment at Los Portales presents ownership and feasibility considerations, these challenges are best addressed through a coordinated district strategy that includes public-realm investment, infrastructure support, and alignment with improvements at Town Mall. **Meaningful transformation of the Easy Street Core depends on progress at both sites, whether pursued in parallel or through coordinated phasing.**

5.2.c Town Mall — Easy Street Anchor Site

Catalyst site within the Easy Street Core

Town Mall is a central and highly visible component of the Easy Street Core and represents a key anchor opportunity for repositioning the Town Center. Along with Los Portales and the Town Hall site, Town Mall plays a defining role in shaping first impressions, pedestrian experience, and market perception of Carefree.

- **Centrally located and highly visible** within the pedestrian district
- **Physically dated and visually inconsistent** with Carefree’s desired identity
- **Heavily used but underperforming** from an experiential and placemaking standpoint
- **Sufficient scale** to support dining, mixed-use concepts, and meaningful public-realm integration

Strategic Opportunity:

The potential relocation of the Post Office to the Bashas’ Center would remove a use that constrains higher-value experiential redevelopment within the Easy Street Core, increase flexibility at Town Mall, and support repositioning toward dining, placemaking, and mixed-use outcomes. When coordinated with reinvestment at Los Portales and public-realm improvements, Town Mall can help reset expectations for quality, activation, and investment across the district.

5.3 Near-Term Opportunities (0–24 Months)

Short-term actions should focus on perception shift and experience improvement rather than structural redevelopment.

5.3.a Quick-Win Actions

- Activation programming that supports dining and evening use
- Façade and storefront improvements:
 - *Recent reinvestment at **Spanish Village** demonstrates the impact of façade and storefront improvements: upgraded exteriors, improved transparency, and cohesive design materially improved tenant quality, visitor perception, and leasing momentum—confirming that targeted improvements can shift market behavior even without full redevelopment.*
- Outdoor dining and patio expansion
- Wayfinding and signage pilots
- Targeted tenant recruitment for dining, wellness, and experiential uses
- **Adaptive reuse of the vacant bank building** for restaurant or specialty retail use, leveraging its existing structure, visibility, and parking configuration to deliver near-term activation without full redevelopment.

These actions build momentum and reduce perceived risk from private developers, investors and tenants.

5.4 Long-Term Opportunities (5+ Years)

Longer-term success depends on aligning redevelopment with Carefree’s optimal positioning.

5.4.a Structural and Programmatic Opportunities

- Signature hospitality or cultural anchor tied to the Town Center
- Residential development should be focused on sites immediately adjacent to the Town Center—specifically the parking area east of the proposed Town Hall or at the southwest corner of Cave Creek Road and Bloody Basin Road—where new housing

can support walkability, dining, and year-round activity without displacing high-impact commercial frontage.

- District-wide design, branding, and operating standards
 - Stronger pedestrian connectivity across all core parcels
 - New ownership or investment at either Los Portales or Town Mall could advance these redevelopment opportunities
-

5.5 District Infrastructure Priorities

Rather than treating infrastructure as parcel-specific, Carefree must address it at the **district level**.

5.5.a Signage and Wayfinding

- Unified visual language and hierarchy
- Clear gateways and arrival cues
- Intuitive pedestrian and parking wayfinding
- Consistent district naming and identity

Purpose: improve orientation, encourage walking, and extend length of stay.

5.5.b Parking

- District-wide supply and demand analysis
- Shared parking agreements among owners
- Town Hall as the primary public parking backbone
- Structured parking considered only where it unlocks redevelopment

Parking is not the goal—it is the enabler.

5.5.c Circulation and Connectivity

- Clear pedestrian corridors linking Town Mall, Easy Street, Gardens, and Town Hall
- Improved crossings, lighting, shade, and landscape continuity

- Walking as the default behavior within the Town Center
-

5.5.d Public Amenities

- Pavilion and Gardens used as year-round, programmable assets with rotating new offerings
 - Smaller, repeatable events aligned with dining, arts, and wellness
 - Public spaces integrated into tenant recruitment and branding
-

5.6 Strategic Synthesis

These elements function together as the **operating system** of the Town Center.

Done collectively, they:

- Improve tenant quality and mix
 - Reduce seasonality impacts
 - Increase dwell time and spending
 - Unlock redevelopment feasibility
 - Reinforce Carefree’s differentiated identity
-

5.7 Parcel Roles Summary

Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall Builising:

Three co-equal catalyst sites within the Easy Street Core, jointly responsible for shaping perception, experience, and long-term economic performance of the Town Center. Each site plays a distinct role, and each may advance independently or in coordination as market demand, feasibility, and site-specific constraints allow.

Carefree Marketplace:

A stable, neighborhood-serving support node and strategic relocation opportunity for civic and service uses that enable higher-value experiential redevelopment elsewhere within the Town Center.

Key Takeaway

Carefree does not need to solve everything at once.

By advancing **Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall as co-equal catalyst opportunities**—whether independently or in coordination—and using public investment to enable rather than replace private redevelopment, the Town can move from aspiration to execution with clarity and confidence.

6. Target Markets and Reach Potential

Carefree’s Town Center must succeed simultaneously for multiple audiences, each with different motivations and decision drivers. This section clarifies **who Carefree must win, what each group values, and how the Town Center strategy aligns with those expectations**—without attempting to be everything to everyone.

6.1 Investors

Target Profile:

Boutique-scale, long-term investors seeking place-based value, quality, and differentiation rather than short-term yield.

6.1.a What Investors Are Looking For

- A clear, defensible identity that differentiates Carefree from nearby submarkets
- Predictable processes and reduced entitlement risk
- A credible path to feasibility for reinvestment projects
- Confidence that surrounding properties will not undermine quality

6.1.b What Carefree Must Deliver

- **One clear investment story:** A refined desert village focused on dining, wellness, arts, and social life
- **Visible public leadership:** Early investment in parking, public realm, and infrastructure—particularly around Town Hall—to enable coordinated private redevelopment at Town Mall and Los Portales
- **Economic fixes:** Zoning flexibility, shared parking, and incentives tied to quality outcomes
- **Predictability:** Clear approval pathways and codified standards
- **District stewardship:** Formation of a BID/owner coalition to protect long-term value

Investor takeaway:

This is a small market with a clear point of view, improving economics, and a Town willing to lead where the private market cannot.

6.2 Developers**Target Profile:**

Experienced developers willing to pursue small-to-mid-scale projects when feasibility gaps are addressed through partnership and flexibility.

6.2.a What Developers Need to See

- Clear “rules of the road” for Town Center projects
- Zoning that reflects real market economics
- District-scale solutions for parking and access
- Willingness by the Town to partner—not just regulate

6.2.b What Carefree Must Deliver

- **Overlay zoning or form-based standards** for the Town Center
- **Integrated residential density** and modest height flexibility tied to public benefits
- **Town Hall–led infrastructure and parking solutions** that unlock redevelopment within the Easy Street Core (Los Portales and Town Mall)
- **Streamlined approvals** with a single point of coordination
- **Support for phased development and interim activation**

Developer takeaway:

The Town understands feasibility and will help remove barriers without compromising quality.

6.3 Visitors**Target Profile:**

Affluent tourists and regional day-trip visitors seeking high-quality dining, culture, and distinctive environments.

6.3.a What Visitors Want

- Clear arrival and easy navigation
- Destination-worthy dining
- Cultural and social energy beyond one-time events
- Comfort, walkability, and a sense of place

6.3.b What Carefree Must Deliver

- **Dining as the primary draw**, clustered and visible
- **Comfort first:** Shade, seating, lighting, and pedestrian continuity
- **Everyday activation:** Arts, music, and programming integrated into daily life
- **A distinct identity:** Calm, elegant, desert-oriented—not busy or generic

Visitor takeaway:

This feels special, easy, and worth staying longer—and coming back.

6.4 Local Trade Area

Target Profile:

Affluent nearby households seeking reliable, premium everyday amenities.

6.4.a What Nearby Residents Value

- Consistent quality and hours
- Dining that competes with North Scottsdale
- Wellness and lifestyle integration
- Ease, calm, and familiarity

6.4.b What Carefree Must Deliver

- **Everyday premium uses:** Dining, wellness, specialty food, personal services
- **Comfort and convenience:** Clear parking, walkability, and maintenance
- **Balanced activation:** Social energy without disruption
- **Year-round reliability**, not seasonal volatility

Resident takeaway:

This is where I go regularly, not just when there's an event.

6.5 Regional Market

Target Profile:

Greater Phoenix residents seeking destinations with character and elevated experiences.

6.5.a Why Regional Visitors Would Choose Carefree

- A calm alternative to Scottsdale's intensity
- An authentic desert village experience
- High-quality dining, arts, and wellness in one walkable setting

6.5.b What Carefree Must Deliver

- **A clear reason to make the trip**, not incremental improvements
- **Signature experiences** (dining, cultural, or wellness-driven) tied to the Town Center
- **A cohesive, walkable district** anchored by the coordinated redevelopment of Town Hall, Los Portales and Town Mall
- **Public realm quality** that meets regional expectations

Regional takeaway:

This is different from the rest of the Valley—and worth the drive.

6.6 Strategic Synthesis

Carefree's market opportunity is strongest when these audiences reinforce one another:

- **Town Hall investment** enables feasibility and signals commitment
- **Los Portales and Town Mall redevelopment** create the experience visitors seek
- **Investors and developers** gain confidence through predictability and partnership
- **Residents and visitors** provide consistent demand that reduces seasonality

Key Takeaway

Carefree does not need more audiences—it needs **clarity and alignment**.

By focusing on **the coordinated repositioning of Town Hall, Los Portales and Town Mall as the core experience and investment anchors**, supported by Town-led infrastructure and district coordination, Carefree can attract the right capital, the right tenants, and the right visitors—on its own terms.

7. Business Development, Marketing and Outreach

This section outlines a **phased, disciplined approach** to business development, marketing, and outreach that builds momentum first, unlocks redevelopment feasibility next, and ultimately anchors Carefree’s long-term identity. The focus is not volume, but **confidence, consistency, and execution.**

7.1 Short-Term Actions (0–24 Months)

Purpose:

Build momentum, change perception, and demonstrate that Carefree can execute—without waiting for major redevelopment.

7.1.a Core Short-Term Priorities

Short-term efforts should concentrate on **visible wins** that immediately improve experience and confidence.

- **Targeted tenant recruitment** focused on:
 - Dining and specialty food
 - Wellness and lifestyle uses
 - Curated retail that complements dining
 - Reuse of existing freestanding buildings, including the vacant bank building, for food and beverage or experiential retail concepts
- **Public realm and storefront upgrades:**
 - Shade, seating, and pedestrian lighting
 - Storefront refreshes (signage, awnings, transparency)
 - Spanish Village provides a local precedent for how coordinated façade investment can catalyze broader reinvestment and improve market perception within a single leasing cycle.
- **Wayfinding pilots:**
 - Clear parking and pedestrian orientation

- Simple district identifiers and “you are here” maps
- **Consistent activation and programming:**
 - Small, recurring events (music, art walks, culinary and wellness programming)
 - Alignment with dining and retail hours
- **Launch of unified Town Center branding:**
 - Clear narrative and visual toolkit
 - Applied consistently across signage, marketing, and recruitment

Geographic Focus:

The **Easy Street Core, including the edges of both Los Portales and Town Mall**, where coordinated improvements can most quickly and visibly shift perception.

Why This Matters:

A small number of high-quality tenants, paired with visible public-realm improvements across the Easy Street Core, can materially shift market perception and momentum within a single season.

7.1.b Short-Term Success Indicators

By the end of this phase, Carefree should see:

- New or improved dining and lifestyle tenants announced or opened
- Noticeable upgrades to storefronts and streetscape
- Improved visitor navigation and walkability
- Increased evening activity and dwell time
- Growing confidence from property owners and developers

7.2 Medium-Term Actions (2–5 Years)

Purpose:

Convert early momentum into durable change by unlocking redevelopment feasibility and formalizing partnerships.

7.2.a Development Partner Outreach (RFI/RFP)

- Issue RFIs to test concepts, interest, and feasibility
 - Advance to targeted RFPs for **priority sites**, especially Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall as three co-equal catalyst redevelopment sites within the Easy Street Core, each able to advance independently or in coordinated phases
 - Emphasize:
 - Experience quality and placemaking
 - Long-term stewardship
 - Phasing and adaptability
 - Public-private partnership models
-

7.2.b Incentivizing Priority Uses

- Focus incentives on uses that strengthen Carefree's positioning:
 - Destination and neighborhood dining
 - Specialty food and beverage
 - Wellness, cultural, and experiential uses
- Tools may include:
 - Tenant improvement assistance
 - Rent structuring or phased support
 - Fee waivers or expedited permitting
- Tie incentives to:
 - Location within the Town Center
 - Year-round operations
 - Participation in branding and programming

7.2.c Redevelopment Planning and De-Risking

- Prepare concept-level frameworks for:
 - **Town Hall parcels (infrastructure, redevelopment, parking, and public-realm enabling role)**
 - **Los Portales and Town Mall (co-equal anchor redevelopment sites within the Easy Street Core)**
- Align zoning and entitlements to support feasibility:
 - Overlay zoning tailored to the Town Center
 - Parking reductions and shared parking strategies
 - Flexible mixed-use allowances tied to quality and activation outcomes

Why This Matters:

Pre-planning shortens timelines, reduces uncertainty, and improves deal viability—especially in a boutique market.

7.2.d Medium-Term Success Indicators

By the end of this phase, Carefree should see:

- One or more catalytic projects approved or under construction
 - Stronger alignment between zoning, infrastructure, and market demand
 - Increased private reinvestment in aging buildings
 - A more balanced and resilient tenant mix
 - Growing regional awareness of Carefree’s evolution
-

7.3 Long-Term Actions (5–10+ Years)

Purpose:

Anchor Carefree’s identity and sustain year-round demand at the regional level.

7.3.a Signature Hospitality or Cultural Anchor

- Identify a right-sized anchor that reinforces Carefree’s identity:
 - Boutique hospitality
 - Cultural or culinary destination
 - Wellness-oriented experience
- Locate the anchor within or directly connected to the Town Center
- Structure partnerships to:
 - Share risk
 - Ensure long-term quality
 - Align operations with Town values

7.3.b Expanded Residential Base

Encouraging integrated residential density within the Town Center, specifically on the parking lot east of the proposed Town Hall or at the southwest corner of Cave Creek Road and Bloody Basin Road, is a critical long-term strategy to support walkability, local businesses, and year-round vitality. This location allows residential uses to reinforce, rather than compete with, the Town Center’s hospitality, dining, and retail focus.

- Encourage modest, well-designed residential additions near the Town Center:
 - Mixed-use and upper-story residential
 - Boutique-scale housing
- Target residents aligned with Carefree’s lifestyle:
 - Empty nesters
 - Second-home owners
 - Wellness- and lifestyle-oriented households
- Ensure residential development:
 - Respects scale and character

- Supports ground-floor activation
 - Integrates with public-realm investments
-

7.3.c Long-Term Success Indicators

By this phase, Carefree should experience:

- A recognizable regional identity tied to a signature anchor
 - Sustained year-round activity and spending
 - Strong private-sector confidence and reinvestment
 - A resilient Town Center supported by residents, visitors, and investors
 - A self-reinforcing cycle of quality and demand
-

7.4 How the Phases Work Together

- **Short-Term:** Build credibility and momentum
- **Medium-Term:** Unlock feasibility and deliver transformation
- **Long-Term:** Anchor identity and sustain success

Each phase builds intentionally on the previous one, ensuring Carefree evolves **deliberately, realistically, and in alignment with its values.**

Key Takeaway

Carefree's path forward is not about doing everything at once.

By sequencing actions, **focusing on the coordinated repositioning of Town Hall, Los Portales and Town Mall as the Easy Street Core anchor sites**, and using public investment to enable—not replace—private redevelopment, the Town can move from aspiration to execution with clarity and confidence.

8. Public-Private Partnership Framework

Carefree’s Town Center strategy depends on **structured collaboration** between the Town and the private sector. Neither can succeed independently. This section defines **clear roles, tools, and governance structures** that translate vision into execution while protecting public interests and private investment.

8.1 Town Responsibilities

Role:

Enable quality private reinvestment by reducing risk, improving feasibility, and setting consistent standards—without acting as a developer.

8.1.a Invest in the Public Realm

Purpose: Signal commitment and raise baseline quality.

Town actions should prioritize:

- Pedestrian comfort (shade, lighting, seating)
- Streetscape and landscape continuity
- Gateways, arrival cues, and wayfinding
- Improvements that connect **Town Hall, Los Portales, Town Mall, Easy Street, and the Gardens**

Focus initial investments around **Town Hall and primary pedestrian routes** to support Town Mall redevelopment and district cohesion.

8.1.b Modernize Zoning and Entitlements

Purpose: Reduce uncertainty and improve feasibility.

Key actions:

- Adopt a **Town Center overlay district** with:
 - Clear form and use expectations

- Modest height and density flexibility
- Parking reductions tied to shared solutions
- Standardize approval pathways for aligned projects
- Publish clear guidance on timelines and review criteria

Predictability—not deregulation—is what attracts quality development.

The **Town Center overlay district and the Business Improvement District (BID) are complementary tools with distinct roles**. The overlay district establishes predictable rules for form, use, density, and parking—improving feasibility and guiding private investment. The BID provides ongoing district stewardship, funding activation, branding, maintenance, and tenant coordination. Together, the overlay enables quality development, while the BID ensures that quality is sustained and activated over time.

8.1.c Deploy Incentives Tied to Outcomes

Purpose: Fix feasibility gaps without compromising standards.

Incentives should be:

- Targeted
- Transparent
- Performance-based

Priority outcomes include:

- Active ground floors
- High-quality design
- Year-round operations
- Dining, wellness, and experiential uses

Tools may include infrastructure cost sharing, parking participation, tenant improvement support, or expedited review—**never unconditional subsidies**.

8.1.d Use Town-Owned Land Strategically

Purpose: Lead where the private market cannot.

Town-owned parcels—especially **Town Hall land**—should be used to:

- Support district parking and access
- Demonstrate quality and commitment
- De-risk adjacent private redevelopment within the Easy Street Core, including Los Portales and Town Mall

Town participation should focus on **infrastructure and enabling roles**, not private building redevelopment.

8.1.e Coordinate and Communicate

Purpose: Build trust and alignment.

- Maintain a single Town Center vision
- Designate a Town Center lead
- Communicate progress clearly to owners, developers, and residents

Consistency builds confidence—and confidence attracts capital.

Town Role Summary:

The Town invests first, sets clear rules, enables feasibility, and uses its assets to unlock private reinvestment—without trying to be the developer.

8.2 Property Owner & Private Sector Responsibilities

Role:

Deliver quality, activation, and long-term stewardship within the framework the Town provides.

8.2.a Reinvest in Buildings and Frontages

- Modernize façades, interiors, lighting, and signage
- Activate ground floors with transparency, patios, and pedestrian engagement
- Align improvements with district standards

Public investment cannot overcome private disinvestment.

8.2.b Curate Tenants Intentionally

- Prioritize tenants that drive foot traffic and social energy
- Emphasize dining, wellness, and experiential uses
- Maintain reliable, year-round operations
- Avoid over-reliance on low-engagement or seasonal uses

Tenant mix determines long-term value.

8.2.c Participate in District-Scale Coordination

- Support shared parking strategies
- Participate in a Business Improvement District (BID)
- Adopt shared maintenance, branding, and design standards

Fragmentation is the enemy of value.

8.2.d Support Activation and Experience

- Extend hours to support evenings and weekends
- Participate in arts, dining, wellness, and cultural programming
- Treat storefronts and patios as extensions of public space

Activation drives dwell time and repeat visits.

8.2.e Take a Long-Term Stewardship View

- Reinvest over time
- Maintain high standards year-round
- Avoid speculative vacancy strategies

Carefree's success depends on patient ownership.

Private Sector Summary:

Private owners reinvest, curate, collaborate, activate, and steward—turning Carefree’s vision into lived experience.

8.3 Town Center Alliance / Business Improvement District (BID)

A Business Improvement District (BID) is the recommended governance and funding mechanism to coordinate branding, activation, maintenance, and tenant strategy across the Town Center. The BID provides the structure necessary to move from fragmented, parcel-by-parcel decision-making to consistent district stewardship—without shifting responsibility to the Town.

8.3.a Purpose of the BID

The Carefree Town Center BID would be a private-sector–led entity that allows property owners to collectively fund and manage services that enhance district performance and protect long-term value. The BID is intended to **operate alongside the Town Center overlay district**, which governs land use and development standards, allowing the BID to focus on operations, activation, and long-term stewardship rather than regulation.

The BID is intended to:

- Strengthen Carefree’s place-based identity
- Improve tenant quality and retention
- Coordinate activation, marketing, and maintenance
- Complement—not replace—Town services
- Provide continuity beyond election cycles

The BID does not control zoning, entitlements, or public infrastructure decisions.

8.3.b Recommended BID Formation Process

The BID should be established through a clear, step-by-step process that builds owner confidence and ensures transparency.

Step 1: Stakeholder Education and Outreach

The Town convenes property owners within the Town Center to:

- Explain the BID concept, benefits, and limitations

- Clarify the difference between Town responsibilities and BID responsibilities
- Share preliminary service priorities aligned with the Town Center strategy

Step 2: Formation of a Property Owner Steering Committee

A representative group of Town Center property owners is formed to:

- Refine BID boundaries
- Define service priorities
- Develop a preliminary budget and assessment approach

Step 3: Preparation of a Draft BID Plan

The Steering Committee prepares a draft plan outlining:

- Proposed services and programs
- Annual budget and assessment methodology
- Governance structure and term
- Accountability and reporting requirements

Step 4: Property Owner Approval

The BID is approved through a formal property owner vote in accordance with state requirements (e.g., majority by assessed value or parcel count).

Step 5: Town Adoption

Upon owner approval, the Town formally establishes the BID through resolution or ordinance.

Step 6: BID Launch

The Board is seated, assessments begin, and services are implemented.

8.3.c BID Boundaries and Participation

- The initial BID boundary should include:
 - Town Mall
 - Easy Street Core
 - Los Portales
 - Town Hall–adjacent commercial properties

- Boundaries may be refined over time with owner approval.
- Only commercial property owners vote; tenants may participate in committees but do not control governance.

Town-owned properties may participate as non-voting partners subject to Council approval.

8.3.d Governance Structure

Board of Directors

- 7–11 voting members
- Majority property owners within the BID
- Representation from both small and large properties
- One non-voting Town liaison

Board Responsibilities

- Approve annual work plans and budgets
- Oversee contracts and programming
- Ensure alignment with the Town Center strategy
- Provide accountability to assessed members

Committees (Optional)

- Branding & Marketing
 - Events & Activation
 - Maintenance & Public Realm
 - Tenant Coordination
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8.3.e Funding and Use of Funds

Assessments

- Predictable, transparent, and equitable
- Based on assessed value, frontage, square footage, or tiered flat rates

Permitted Uses

- District branding and marketing
- Activation and programming
- Supplemental cleaning and maintenance
- Wayfinding and private-realm signage
- Tenant recruitment and coordination
- Professional management services

BID funds shall not replace core municipal services.

8.3.f Relationship Between the Town and the BID

The Town and BID operate as partners with clearly defined roles:

Town

- Infrastructure
- Parking
- Zoning and entitlements
- Public safety
- Capital improvements

BID

- Branding and promotion
- Activation and events
- Supplemental maintenance
- Tenant coordination
- Day-to-day district stewardship

Coordination occurs through:

- Annual joint work planning
- Quarterly check-ins

- Shared performance metrics where appropriate
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8.3.g Term, Accountability, and Renewal

- Initial BID term: 5 years
 - Annual work plan and budget presented to members
 - Annual reporting on expenditures and outcomes
 - Renewal subject to property owner vote and Town approval
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Why a BID Is Essential for Carefree

Without a BID, Carefree's Town Center will continue to suffer from:

- Fragmented decision-making
- Inconsistent standards
- Reactive tenanting
- Short-term activation without stewardship

With a BID, Carefree gains:

- Consistent identity and experience
- Improved tenant recruitment outcomes
- Shared investment in quality
- Long-term value protection

9. Conclusion

Carefree has the character, market opportunity, and stakeholder alignment to reposition its Town Center as a distinctive, experience-driven district through the advancement of **three co-equal catalyst sites—Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall—each capable of progressing independently or in coordination as demand and feasibility allow**. Success depends on:

- **Advancing Town Hall, Los Portales, and Town Mall as three co-equal catalyst redevelopment sites, each capable of independently shaping momentum and market perception**
- **Town leadership that enables—rather than replaces—private investment**
- **Strategic reuse of the Town Hall site for hospitality, dining, and retail as a visible catalyst project**
- **New ownership and/or investment in Los Portales and Town Mall could unleash opportunities for new, dynamic tenants**
- **Relocation of municipal offices to existing space at 11 East Sundial to preserve prime Town Center property for higher-impact uses**
- **Integrated residential development on adjacent sites to support walkability, dining, and year-round vitality**
- **Formal district governance through a Business Improvement District (BID)**

These recommendations are offered as a market-informed implementation framework to support future decision-making—reinforcing Carefree’s values while providing a realistic, phased path from vision to execution.