PEDE Quarterly Update: Economic Development

August 18, 2026

Rachel Taylor
Economic Development Division Manager

Chris Corl
Director - Community & Regional Entertainment Facilities

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Key Takeaways

- Unemployment is stabilizing from the official post-Helene high of 10.4%.
- The Leisure and Hospitality sector saw the largest gains in employment.
- We tracked business impacts and recovery through three regional surveys. Businesses are recovering, but continue to seek financial supports.
- CAYLA continues to see 100% college acceptance and generates strong interest during recruitment each year.
- Hotel and vacation rental occupancy, demand, and revenues are up.
- Use of event facilities and spaces is increasing, but FY 27 is trending slower

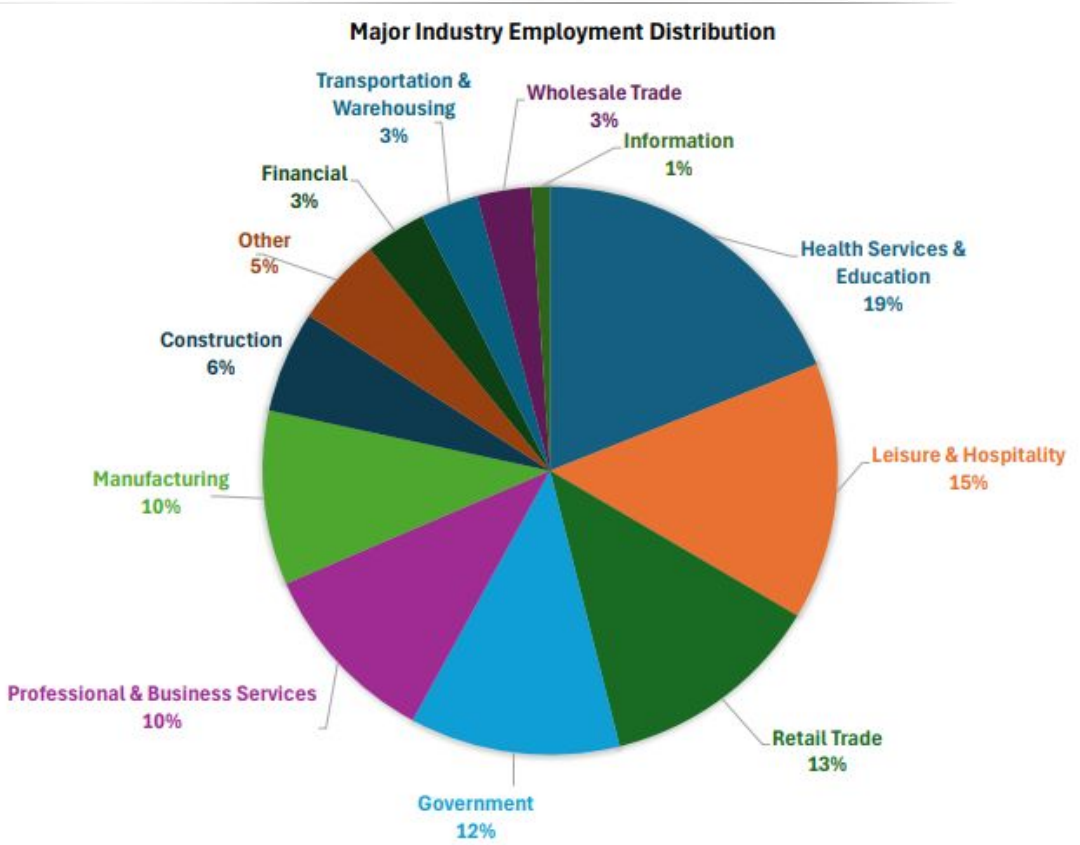
FY27 Quarterly Reporting Schedule

- Q1: Economic Development
  - WNC Helene Feedback Surveys
- Q2: Development and permitting
- Q3: Transit and parking
- Q4: Sustainability and resilience

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June 2026 Economic Indicators – Riverbird Research

- **Asheville city unemployment rates:**
  - June 2026: 3.4%
  - June 2025: 4.6%
  - September 2024: 2.6%
  - Post-Helene High: 10.4%
- **Largest Gains:**
  - Leisure and Hospitality: +4.9%
  - Professional and Business Services: +4.2%
- **Largest Contractions:**
  - Transportation and Warehousing: -6.2%



Business Feedback Survey

01

6 Months Post-Storm

early 2025

First survey launched in February 2025 (results in April) to **capture immediate operational challenges and early impacts.**

02

12 Months Post-Storm

fall 2025

Second Survey launched in Fall 2025 to track **business recovery as major utility and road networks stabilized.**

03

18 Months Post-Storm

spring 2026

Third Survey launched in Spring 2026 to assess longer-term **trajectory and persistent operational gaps.**

Riverbird Research, in partnership with the City of Asheville and others, conducted three business impact surveys, providing snapshots and a longitudinal view of Western North Carolina's economic recovery following Tropical Storm Helene.

Business Confidence

Takeaway
The snapshot of business confidence likely reflects variations in respondents across surveys, gradual stabilization despite ongoing strain, and business adaptations to remain open.

Fewer businesses reported imminent risk of closure, but financial strain remains persistent.

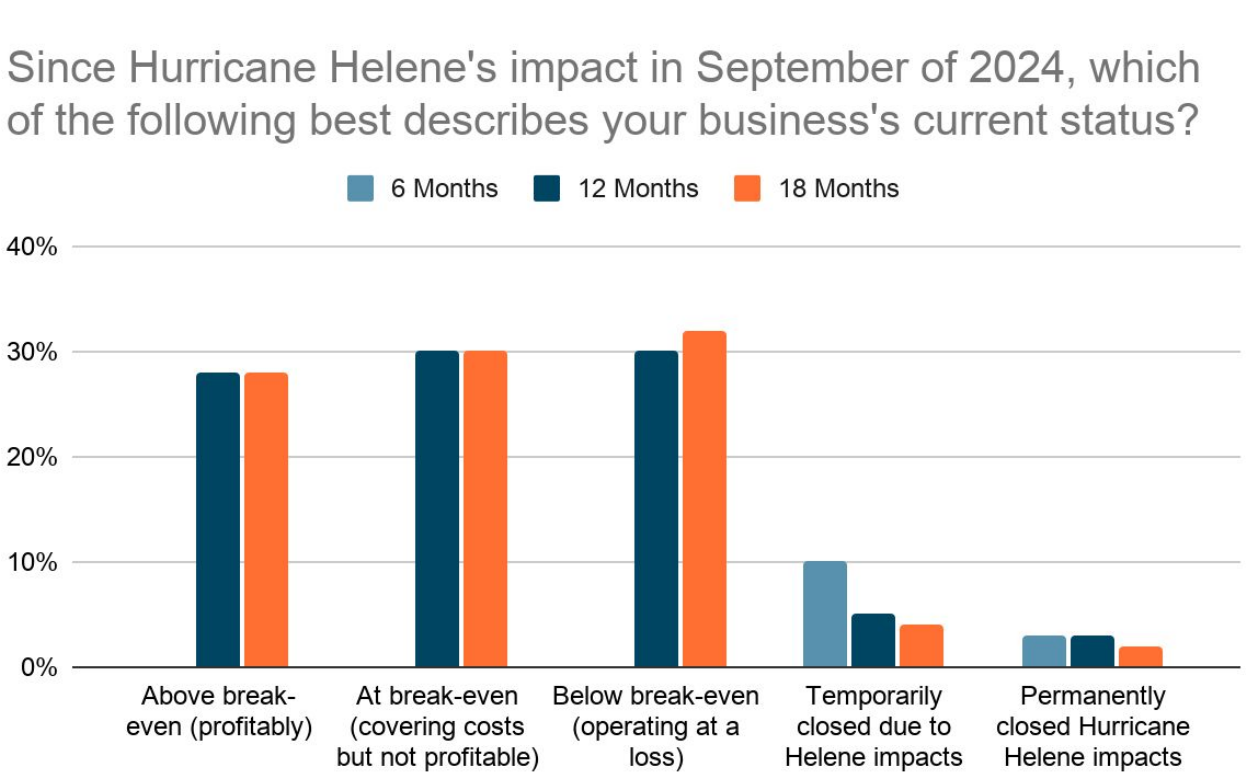


Operational / Financial Status

Takeaway
Operational/financial status remained uneven across WNC region and industry sectors.

- **Prof. Services:** Highest sector operating above break-even.
- **Healthcare:** Highest sector operating at break-even.
- **Arts & Ent.:** Highest sector operating below break-even.

6-Month Note
76% Fully operational
33% Partially operational



Revenue Losses

Takeaway
As of the 18 month survey, 76% estimated some level of revenue loss.

6-Month Note
Impact to revenue projections:

- No impact: **5%**
- Increase: **1%**
- Tangible loss: **26%**
- Considerable loss: **32%**
- Substantial loss: **18%**
- Nearing complete loss: **9%**
- Complete loss: **5%**
- I don't know: **3%**

Please estimate your business's total revenue loss related to Hurricane Helene to date, if any.



Loss Drivers

Takeaway

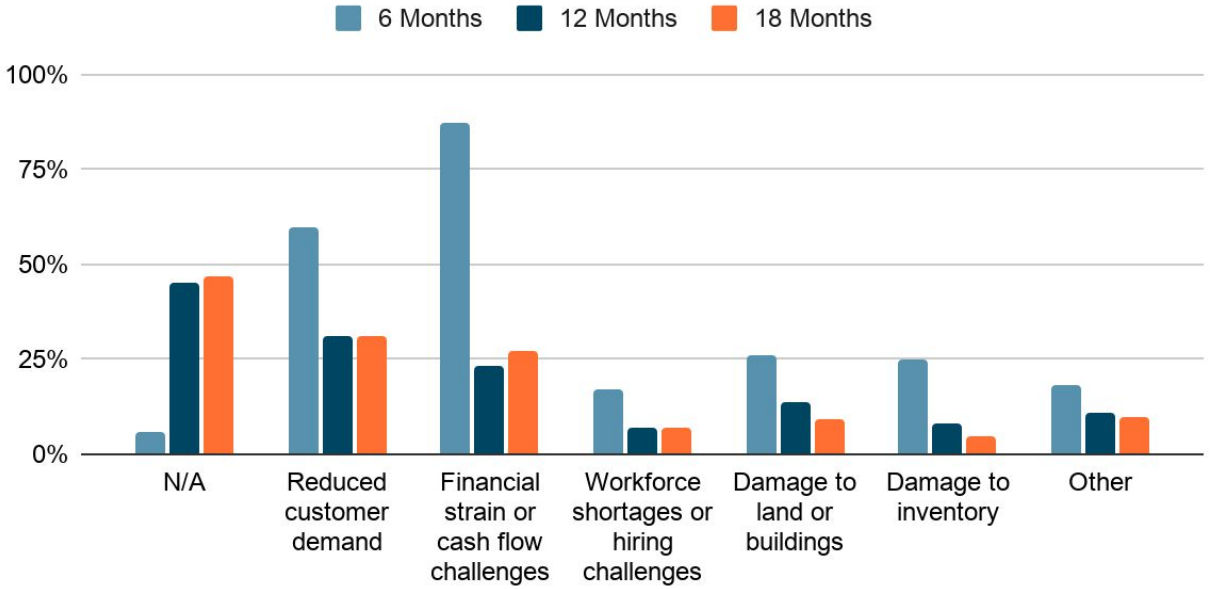
Reduced customer demand and financial strain were most frequently cited for operating below break-even or being temporarily closed.

6-Month Note

Challenges to recover lost revenue:

- Supply chain disruptions: **15%**
- Road / bridge damage: **14%**

If you are operating below break-even or temporarily closed, what is the main reason?



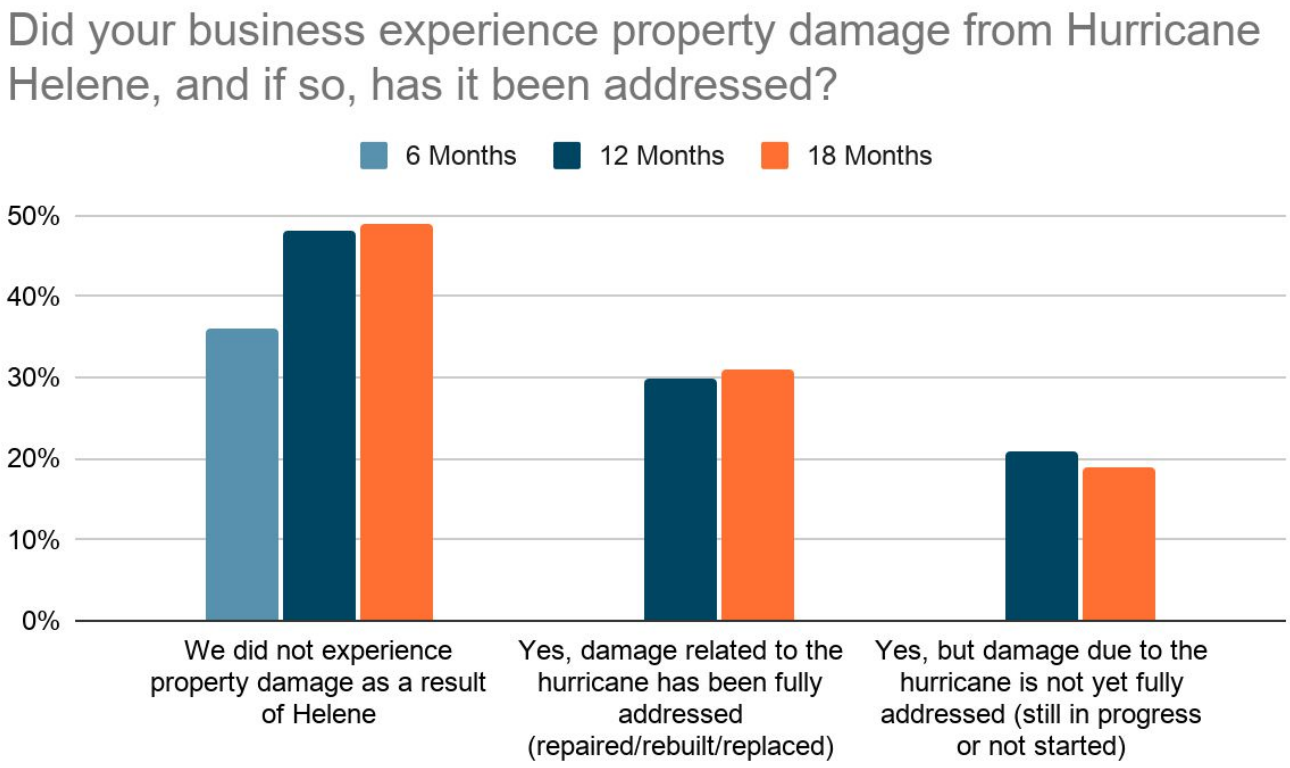
Property Damage

Takeaway

At 18 months post-Helene, 23% of reported estimated outstanding costs related to property damage that had not been fully addressed.

6-Month Note:

Questions focused more on the nature and extent of the damage than whether the damage had been addressed.

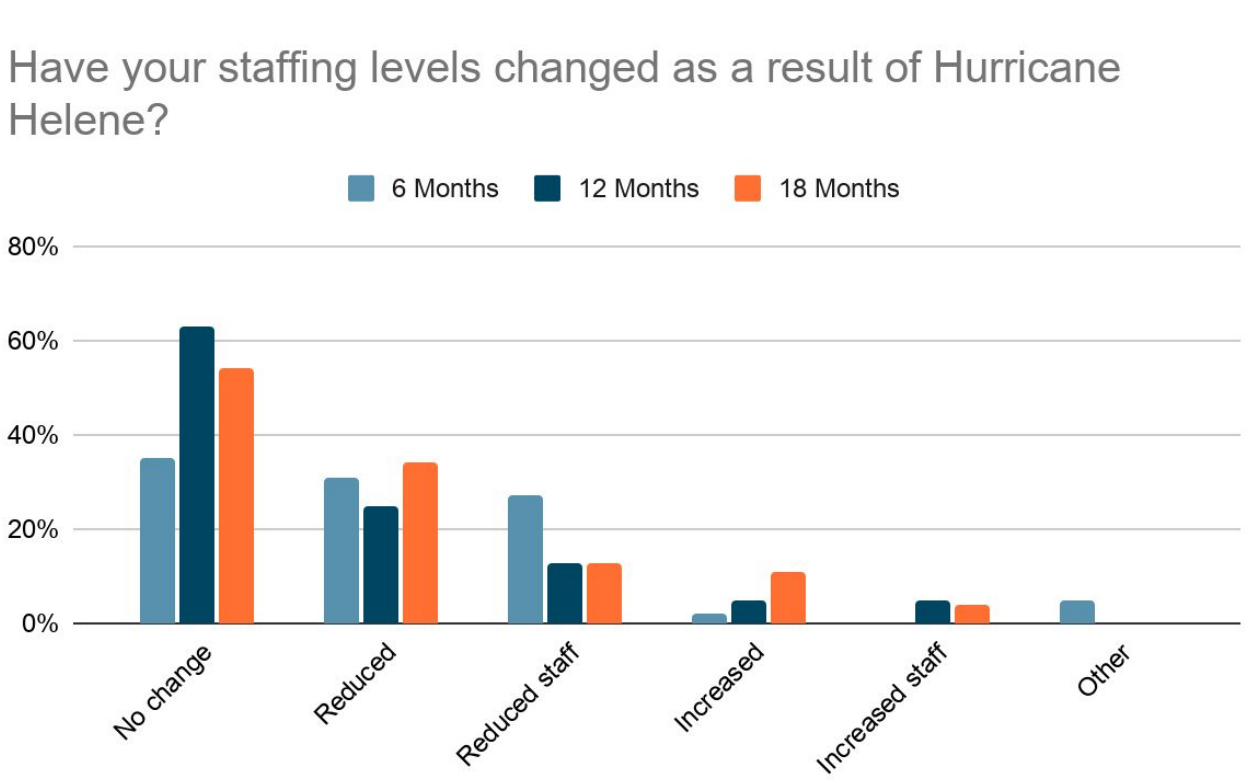


Staffing Levels

Takeaway

Accommodations categories represented the highest sector with reduced staff numbers or hours.

- Professional and business services reported the highest sector with no change in staffing levels, higher staff numbers, or higher staff hours.

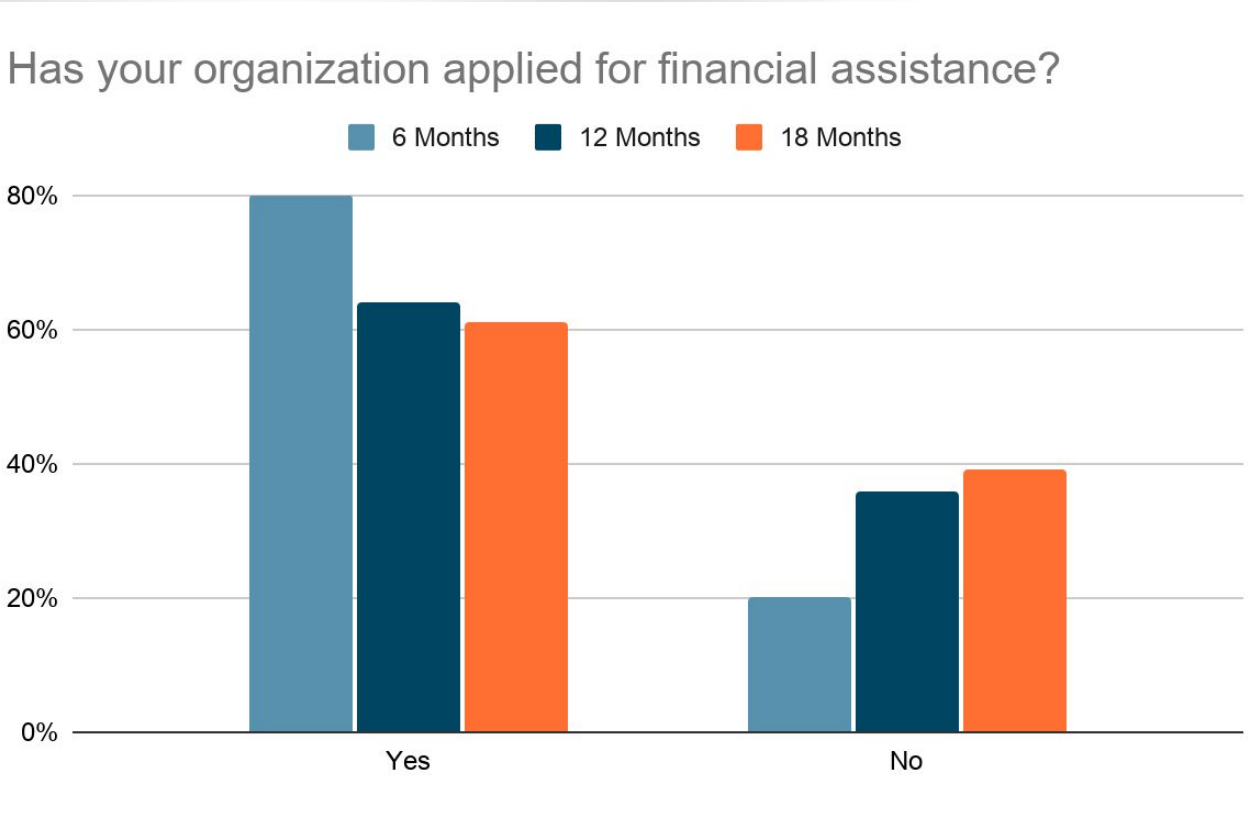


Resource Gaps

Takeaway

As of 18 Months, non-profit organizations were the most frequently reported source for both applications (32%) and assistance received (28%).

- Assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration (22% applied; 15% received) and insurance (24% applied; 18% received) were also commonly reported.
- 6% of respondents indicated they had applied for assistance but had not yet received funding.



CAYLA – FY26 Review

FY26 Theme

"Create Our Own Definition of Success"

The program increases access to opportunities by giving students hands-on experience through college tours, building practical life skills, providing college and financial aid support, paid internships, and more.

Inaugural Overnight Trip

First overnight trip to Atlanta, GA to explore the intersection of place, history, education, business, and cultural influence on leadership.

35
Enrolled Students
Incl. 22 Graduating Seniors

100%
College Acceptance
Rate among seniors

25
Internship Sites
Providing paid experience

6
Workshops
Focused on skill building

$1,176,053
Total Scholarships Received

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Air Travel & Lodging - Year to Date Change

April 2026	Percent Change		Percent Change
Hotel Occupancy	+ 4.5%	Hotel Demand	+ 5.2%
Hotel ADR	+ 15.2%	Hotel RevPAR	+ 3%
Vacation Rental Occupancy	+ 4.4%	Vacation Rental Demand	+ 7.2%
Vacation Rental ADR	+ 12%	Vacation Rental RevPAR	+ 16.9%
Airport Passengers	+ 3.2%	Lodging Sales	+ 25.1%

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Travel and tourism impact highlights for 2025

- Visitor spending dropped 2% to $2.6 billion in 2025, which is down to 2021 levels.
- The travel and tourism sector directly employs nearly 8 out of 10 people in Buncombe County.
- In Buncombe County, travel and hospitality-related state sales and excise taxes, along with taxes on personal and corporate income, generated a total of $113 million in revenue.
- Local businesses that support and benefit from travel produced about $102 million in local taxes through occupancy, sales, and property tax revenue.
- Each Buncombe County resident saved more than $764 in state and local taxes as a direct result of visitor spending in the county. Savings per capita statewide averaged $244.

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Nature Center, Golf Course & OSE

FY25 to FY26 Comparison	Attendance/Use	Total Revenue	Total Expense	Youth Programs
Muni Golf	+ 2%	- 17%	- 1%	+ 48%
WNC Nature Center	+ 4%	+ 52%	+10%	- 2%

Office of Special Events	**FY 2024–25**	**FY 2025–26**	**Change**
Events on public property	219	390	**+78.1%**
Avg. attendees/event	580	454	**−21.7%**
Total attendance	126,933	176,933	**+39.4%**

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HCCA Event Facilities Year to Year

Fiscal ‘25 - Fiscal ‘26 Comparison	Percent Change
Attendance	+ 17%
Usage dates	+ 3%
Gross Ticket Sales	+ 46%
Total Expenses	+ 33%
Revenue Per Attendee	+ 25%

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Aston Park Tennis Center Year to Year

Calendar 2024 to 2025 Comparison	Percent Change
Season Passholders	+ 4%
Total Usage	+ 21%
Asheville Open	- 19%
Services	+ 1%
Leagues	+ 18%
Total Revenue	+ 10%

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