



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: JULY 15, 2025

FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WARD: 1
DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: PLANNING CASE DP-2025-00469 – REQUEST TO DESIGNATE RIVERSIDE
CITY HALL - LOCATED AT 3900 MAIN STREET - AS A CITY LANDMARK

ISSUE:

Adopt a Resolution to designate Riverside City Hall, located at 3900 Main Street, as a City Landmark

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. **DETERMINE** that Planning Case DP-2025-00469 (Historic Designation), to designate Riverside City Hall as a City Landmark, is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Exemption) and 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment), as the proposal will have no significant effect on the environment, identifies the structure as a cultural resource, and preserves the historic character of a cultural resource;
2. **APPROVE** Planning Case DP-2025-00469 (Historic Designation) based on, and subject to, the Cultural Heritage Board facts for findings outlined in the attached Cultural Heritage Board staff report;
3. **ADOPT** the attached Resolution designating Riverside City Hall as a City Landmark;

CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS:

On July 18, 2025, the Cultural Heritage Board (CHB) unanimously voted (7 ayes) to recommend that the City Council approve Planning Case DP-2025-00469 and designate Riverside City Hall as a City Landmark (Attachments 2 and 3).

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

A “Landmark” is defined in Section 20.50.010 of Title 20 of the Riverside Municipal Code as:

- A. Any improvement or natural feature that is an exceptional example of a historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, community, aesthetic or artistic heritage of the City, retains a high degree of integrity; and

B. meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history;
2. Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history;
3. Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship;
4. Represents the work of a notable builder, designer, or architect, or important creative individual;
5. Embodies elements that possess high artistic values or represents a significant structural or architectural achievement or innovation;
6. Reflects significant geographical patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, particular transportation modes, or distinctive examples of park or community planning, or cultural landscape;
7. Is one of the last remaining examples in the City, region, State, or nation possessing distinguishing characteristics of an architectural or historical type or specimen; or
8. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

DISCUSSION:

Located at 3900 Main Street, Riverside City Hall is a Brutalist-New Formalist style civic building that was designed by the local architectural firm of Ruhnau, Evans, and Steinmann, and was constructed between 1973 - 1975.

After World War II, Riverside's population surged from about 47,000 in 1950 to over 140,000 by 1970, creating a need for updated civic facilities. In response, the City launched major projects like the Riverside Main Library (1964) and the Pedestrian Mall (1966), also designed by Ruhnau, Evans, and Steinmann. The existing 1923 City Hall was too small, so a larger, more modern building was planned to meet both current needs and future growth.

Located at the south end of the Pedestrian Mall, the new City Hall was designed to make a strong visual statement. Its style blended the bold, heavy forms of Brutalism with the symmetry and refined materials of New Formalism—featuring flat roofs, raised platforms, repeating arches, and public plazas to balance modern design with community appeal. Therefore, Riverside City Hall represents a unique blend of Brutalism and New Formalism styles of architecture and is eligible for City Landmark designation under criterion 3

As previously mentioned, local architectural firm Ruhnau, Evans, and Steinmann designed City Hall. Herman Ruhnau is recognized as one of the most prominent mid-century architects in the City, with works including but not limited to the Marcy Branch Library, Press Enterprise Building Riverside County Law Library, County Law Office of Public Defender, La Sierra High School, and many more. Swiss architect Kurt E. Steinmann, who led the design team, especially influenced the design and often spoke publicly about the project. According to his son Josef, Steinmann insisted on including the distinctive arches in the building's outer curtain wall. Steinmann is known locally for his Horizon Homes and other notable work and later became president of the local AIA chapter; therefore, City Hall is also eligible for City Landmark designation under criterion 4.

With no major alteration, the City Hall retains a high degree of integrity required for Landmark designation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Prior to the CHB and City Council meetings, public notices were mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the site.

As of the writing of this report, no responses have been received by staff regarding this historic designation request.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This item contributes to the Envision Riverside 2025 City Council Strategic Priority 2 – Community Well-Being (Goal 2.3 – Strengthen neighborhood identities and improve community health and the physical environment through amenities and programs that foster an increased sense of community and enhanced feelings of pride and belonging citywide).

This item aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. **Community Trust** - This Landmark Designation request is being reviewed during a Public Hearing before the City Council and the public is able to provide comments.
2. **Equity** - Historic property information associated with this designation will be added to the City's Historic Resources Inventory, which will be available to the public. This will allow information about the historic property to be available to all residents
3. **Fiscal Responsibility** - No City General Funds are being allocated as part of this Landmark Designation.
4. **Innovation** - This Landmark Designation request made use of current research practices and looks at historic integrity based on best practices approaches.
5. **Sustainability and Resiliency** - This Landmark Designation will help to preserve the City's collective history for future generations.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact resulting from the City Landmark designation.

Prepared by: Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer
Reviewed by: Jennifer Lilley, Community & Economic Development Director
Certified as to
availability of funds: Kristie Thomas, Finance Director/Assistant Chief Financial Officer
Approved by: Mike Futrell, City Manager
Approved as to form: Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Resolution for Historic Designation
2. Cultural Heritage Board Staff Report – June 18, 2025
3. Cultural Heritage Board Draft Minutes – June 18, 2025
4. Presentation