



Community & Economic Development Department
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Planning Division

CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD MEETING DATE: JUNE 17, 2026
AGENDA ITEM NO.: 5

PROPOSED PROJECT

Case Numbers	PC-2026-00388 (Historic Designation)	
Request	To consider a Historic Designation request for designation of Lionhead as a City Landmark	
Applicant	Jen Mermilliod of JM Research & Consulting on behalf of Malissa McKeith	
Project Location	2881 Rumsey Drive, situated on the east side of Rumsey Drive between Caramel Way and Victoria Avenue	
APN	223092031	
Ward	3	
Neighborhood	Victoria	
Historic District	Not Applicable	
Historic Designation	Not Applicable	
Staff Planner	Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer 951-826-5507 swatson@riversideca.gov	

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Cultural Heritage Board recommend that the City Council:

1. **DETERMINE** that Planning Case PC-2026-00388 (Historic Designation) for the designation of the Lionhead as a City Landmark is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Rule) 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; and

2. **APPROVE** Planning Case PC-2026-00388 (Historic Designation), based on the facts of findings, and designate the Lionhead as a City Landmark.

BACKGROUND

Lionhead

Lionhead is located at 2881 Rumsey Drive in the Victoria neighborhood of the City. Constructed in 1926, the property was designed and constructed by architect Henry L.A. Jekel for developer and orchardist Howard G. Heisler. The estate includes a two-story Spanish Eclectic residence, detached gatehouse, perimeter walls, landscaped grounds, and remnant features associated with an earlier citrus grove development, including portions of a historic well/cistern and perimeter wall dating from approximately 1890–1904.

The residence reflects the highly ornamental and picturesque qualities of the Spanish Eclectic style popular in Southern California during the 1920s, blending influences from Spanish, Mediterranean, Moorish, Byzantine, and Italian Renaissance architectural traditions. The property was prominently developed as a hillside estate within the Victoria Heights subdivision and became associated with Riverside's citrus-era residential expansion during the early twentieth century.

Howard G. Heisler

Howard G. Heisler was a developer, orchardist, civic leader, and prominent figure associated with both Laguna Beach and Riverside during the early twentieth century. Originally from New Jersey, Heisler first came to California as a surveyor for the federal Department of the Interior before becoming active in real estate development and citrus cultivation.

Heisler is most closely associated with the development of Laguna Beach and its emerging "Art Colony," though he spent approximately seven years in Riverside between 1926 and 1933. During this period, Lionhead became a center for social gatherings, civic meetings, and entertainment. Heisler remained active in numerous organizations, including the Riverside Chamber of Commerce, Victoria Avenue Citrus Association, Riverside Lions Club, and Riverside Community Players. He also worked on regional water and conservation issues affecting Riverside agriculture and development.

Following the death of his wife, Lucinda Heisler, in 1932, Heisler sold the property and returned to Laguna Beach, where he later served multiple terms as city councilmember and mayor.

Henry L.A. Jekel

Henry L.A. Jekel was a prominent Southern California architect active during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born in Germany, Jekel established a prolific architectural practice that contributed significantly to the built environment of Southern California, particularly in Riverside, Los Angeles, and Orange counties.

Jekel became closely associated with Riverside beginning in the early 1920s and designed a variety of residential, civic, institutional, and commercial buildings that reflected the architectural tastes of the period. His work incorporated Victorian, Craftsman, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean influences, though he became

particularly known locally for his Spanish-inspired designs. Notable works associated with Jekel include the nearby Benedict Castle as well as numerous residential and commercial commissions throughout Southern California.

ANALYSIS

The applicant is requesting approval of a Historic Designation to designate Lionhead as a City Landmark. The applicant has provided an architectural description, statement of significance, photographs documenting the architecture and site setting, and primary and secondary source documentation supporting the nomination. (Exhibits 2 and 3).

Architectural Description

Lionhead occupies an elevated terraced knoll on the east side of Rumsey Drive north of Carmel Way and retains a prominent hillside setting overlooking the surrounding neighborhood. Originally developed within a mature citrus grove, the approximately one-acre property includes the primary residence, a detached gatehouse, perimeter walls, patios, terraces, mature landscaping, a well/cistern feature, swimming pool, and associated site improvements. The residence is approached by a circular driveway and pedestrian walkways that wind through landscaped grounds containing mature palm, cypress, avocado, and citrus trees.

The two-story residence was constructed in 1926 in the Spanish Eclectic style and is composed of irregular intersecting masses arranged in an asymmetrical plan. The masonry structure rests on a raised concrete foundation strengthened with subgrade piers and is clad in smooth Spanish-finish stucco. A series of combined hipped and gabled roof forms clad in red Mission barrel clay tile cap the structure and terminate in open eaves with exposed carved rafters, decorative beam ends, and original copper gutters and downspouts. The varied roof heights and cantilevered upper-story forms contribute to the building's highly picturesque appearance.

The principal façade faces west/northwest and is dominated by a projecting rotunda-like entry mass capped by a radial hipped tile roof with cupola and weathervane. The rounded entry element incorporates arched leaded-glass casement windows arranged in a stepped configuration beneath clerestory openings and decorative wood detailing reminiscent of an open belvedere. A deeply recessed carved wood entry door is set within a stuccoed surround accented with hand-painted decorative stenciling.

Fenestration throughout the residence consists primarily of wood-framed multi-light casement windows in rectangular, square, and arched configurations. Several windows incorporate decorative leaded and colored glass designs, including prominent fixed picture windows featuring heraldic lion and fleur-de-lis motifs. Decorative wrought iron grilles, diamond-patterned stucco recesses, balconettes, and cantilevered upper-story masses further articulate the façades and reinforce the eclectic Mediterranean character of the design.

Exterior living spaces are integrated throughout the residence and include brick patios, pergolas, balconies, terraces, and rooftop deck areas. A partially enclosed brick service patio adjacent to the kitchen is defined by curved stucco and exposed brick walls, while a larger patio adjoining the living room and sunroom features pergola elements supported by stuccoed corbels and wrought iron posts. On the rear elevation, an elevated patio extends nearly the full width of the residence and is enclosed by

decorative concrete balustrades with double balusters, square posts, urns, fountains, and lionhead wall features. A cantilevered balcony supported by carved wood posts and beams shelters portions of the rear patio and visually connects the upper and lower levels of the residence.

The interior retains a high degree of historic integrity and contains extensive original materials and finishes associated with the 1926 construction. Character-defining interior features include plaster ceilings with exposed beams and hand-painted decoration, carved wood detailing, mahogany stair railings and trim, built-in cabinetry, arched openings, original wood doors and hardware, decorative ironwork, historic wood and tile flooring, and original tile, fixtures, and fittings within bathrooms and service spaces.

Located near the front perimeter wall at the northwest corner of the property, the detached gatehouse was constructed concurrently with the residence and designed in a matching Spanish Eclectic style. The small structure features stucco walls, a combined hipped-and-gabled red tile roof with exposed shaped rafters, multi-light wood windows and French doors, and a recessed entry porch with arched openings overlooking the circular driveway.

Additional site features contribute to the historic estate character of the property, including the curving stucco and exposed brick perimeter wall along Rumsey Drive, decorative gates, brick walkways, terraced landscaping, mature vegetation, and a concrete well/cistern feature that predates construction of the residence. A swimming pool and related hardscape improvements added in 1959 occupy the northern portion of the property and include compatible balustrades, fountains, and landscaped terraces.

Alterations to the property include a 1966 second-story addition above the attached garage, modifications to the sunroom during the 1970s, and construction of a rear elevator, gym addition, rooftop deck, and detached shed completed in 2010. Since 2009, substantial restoration and rehabilitation work has been completed, including repair of plaster finishes, restoration of historic windows, refinishing of interior materials, replacement of mechanical systems, and rehabilitation of landscape and site features. Despite these changes, the property retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Statement of Significance

Lionhead is historically and architecturally significant as an outstanding example of Spanish Eclectic residential architecture in Riverside. Constructed in 1926, the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of the style through its asymmetrical massing, stucco exterior surfaces, red clay tile roofs, decorative ironwork, carved wood detailing, and integration of architecture and landscape design.

The property is further significant as the work of noted architect Henry L.A. Jekel, whose designs contributed substantially to the architectural development of Riverside and Southern California during the early twentieth century. Lionhead is considered one of Jekel's most refined and cohesive residential designs and demonstrates a high degree of craftsmanship and artistic expression.

Despite later alterations, Lionhead retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic and architectural significance. The residence, gatehouse, site features, and landscape

collectively reflect the prosperity, architectural tastes, and residential development patterns associated with Riverside's citrus-era expansion during the early twentieth century.

TITLE 20 EVALUATION

Under Title 20 (Cultural Resources), "Landmark" means: "Any improvement or natural feature that is an exceptional example of a historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, community, aesthetic or artistic heritage of the City, that retains a high degree of integrity." Based on the applicable criteria from Chapter 20.50 of Title 20, Lionhead qualifies for Landmark Designation as follows:

FINDING: Criterion 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.

FACTS: The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Eclectic style and represents an excellent example of high-style residential architecture from Riverside's citrus-era development period. Constructed in 1926, the residence displays the defining characteristics of the Spanish Eclectic style through its asymmetrical massing, irregular composition of intersecting forms, low-pitched red clay tile roofs, smooth stucco wall surfaces, decorative carved wood detailing, exposed rafters, arched openings, ornamental wrought iron features, leaded glass windows, balconies, patios, pergolas, and integration of architecture with the surrounding terraced landscape.

The residence further reflects the picturesque design principles associated with the Spanish Eclectic style through its varied roof forms, cantilevered upper-story masses, prominent entry rotunda, decorative fenestration, and extensive use of Mediterranean and Moorish-inspired detailing. The detached gatehouse, perimeter walls, patios, terraces, fountains, mature landscaping, and remnant citrus grove features collectively reinforce the estate-like architectural composition and historic setting of the property.

Additionally, original interior character-defining features that are still extant and contribute to the architectural significance include barrel ceilings with plastered beams, corbels, and hand-painted frescos; wood beamed and coffered ceilings with hand-painted stenciling; plaster wall finishes; a curving Lamoah mahogany staircase and balustrade; built-in wood cabinetry; arched hallways, doorways, and alcoves; pocket doors, wood doors, and baseboards of Lamoah mahogany; decorative wrought iron features; original door and window hardware; walnut, bleached walnut, black walnut, bird's eye maple wood and tile flooring; iron registers and grilles; and original bath tile, fixtures, and fittings. These surviving materials and finishes demonstrate a high degree of craftsmanship and retain important aspects of the residence's original design intent.

FINDING: Criterion 4: Represents the work of a notable builder, designer, or architect, or important creative individual.

FACTS: The proposed designation satisfies Criterion 4 because the property represents the work of notable architect Henry L.A. Jekel, an important designer whose work contributed significantly to the architectural development of Southern California during the early twentieth century. Jekel was a prolific architect associated with numerous residential, commercial, civic, and institutional projects throughout Riverside, Los Angeles, and Orange counties, and became particularly known for his Spanish-inspired architectural designs during the 1920s.

Lionhead is considered one of Jekel's most refined residential commissions in Riverside and is unusual in that Jekel reportedly both designed and constructed the residence. The property demonstrates a high level of craftsmanship, cohesive architectural composition, and integration of site and structure. The property reportedly reflects an unusual degree of creative freedom afforded to Jekel during both the design and construction process, resulting in a highly individualized and expressive interpretation of the Spanish Eclectic style.

The residence demonstrates Jekel's mastery of Spanish Colonial Revival Mediterranean-inspired residential architecture through its sophisticated massing, ornamental detailing, integration of indoor and outdoor spaces, and careful relationship to the sloping hillside site. As a highly intact and architecturally distinguished example of Jekel's work, the property retains the ability to convey the architect's original design intent and artistic vision.

Although the property has undergone alterations over time, including additions completed in 1966 and 2010, the modifications have generally remained compatible with the original architectural design and do not substantially diminish the property's integrity. The residence retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association sufficient to convey its architectural significance.

PUBLIC NOTICE AND COMMENTS

A public hearing notice was 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 proposal.

APPEAL INFORMATION

Actions by the Cultural Heritage Board, including any environmental finding, may be appealed to the City Council within ten calendar days after the decision. Appeal filing and processing information may be obtained from the Planning Division by calling 951-826-5800.

EXHIBITS LIST

1. Aerial/Location Map
2. Historic Designation Application
3. Current Photos

Prepared by: Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer
Approved by: Laurel Reimer, City Planner