



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: May 13, 2026 REPORT NO. HRB-26-021

HEARING DATE: May 28, 2026

SUBJECT: **ITEM #2 – 4804 BIONA DRIVE**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Biona Property Trust 09-19-2024; represented by BFSA Environmental Services

LOCATION: 4804 Biona Drive, Kensington-Talmadge Community, Council District 9
APN 465-261-13-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the property located at 4804 Biona Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 4804 Biona Drive under any adopted HRB Criteria.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on

certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 4804 Biona Drive is a one-story, Spanish Colonial Revival-style single-family residential building constructed in 1933 in the Kensington-Talmadge Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on the site include a 2005 detached garage and a pool. The property is located on a corner lot within a residential setting. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1933, the property has been modified as follows: In 1960, a patio cover and concrete slab were installed at the west elevation, but they were later removed. After 1970, a metal grille with scrollwork was added to the primary façade double-hung window (see Attachment 1). Between 1980 and 2004, the front door's glazing was replaced with a grilles-between-the-glass unit. In 1998, a remodel project replaced an original window at the south elevation with a pair of casement windows in a modified opening, removed an existing door and a window opening at the west elevation, and installed a pair of new French doors in their place. In 2005, a one-story attached addition was constructed on the west elevation. As part of this project, the south-elevation courtyard stucco wall was raised, the tile roof was replaced in kind, and modern bird blockers were added. The original detached garage was demolished, and a new garage and pool were constructed. Between 2005 and 2018, a north elevation single-hung window opening was enlarged and replaced with a vinyl sliding window. Between 2014 and 2016, solar panels were added to the roof. Between 2018 and 2019, a cast-iron railing was added at the entry path. In May of 2026, the owner removed the non-original metal window grille from the primary elevation (see Attachment 2). Heritage Preservation staff did not review any of the aforementioned projects for consistency with the [Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation](#).

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by BFS Environmental Services, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff disagrees and finds that the building is not eligible under any HRB Criteria. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), as follows.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The subject property has a T-shaped plan. It has a principal low-pitched, cross-gabled Mission half-barrel clay tile roof, and the clay tiles terminate at eaves with bird blockers. Gable ends are emphasized with decorative corbels. The exterior is clad in a hand-troweled, irregular stucco finish. The east elevation is the primary elevation. It features a partial-width covered porch formed by an extending shed roof on trabeated (post-and-lintel) wood supports with corbel detailing. Windows are single-lite wooden fixed and double-hung one-over-one windows. The wooden front door contains a modern grilles-between-the-glass glazing. The south elevation features a tapered stucco chimney with an inset, a modern divided-lite pair of casement windows, and two double-hung wood windows. The west elevation contains the rear elevation, featuring modern French doors, modern

casement windows, and a single original wood double-hung window. The 2005 addition extends from this façade and features vinyl windows. Its design also mimics the original 1933 portions of the building by replicating the low-pitched roof, gable-end fascia board, and corbels. The north elevation contains four original wood windows as well as a modern vinyl slider window in an enlarged opening.

Following the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition, the romantic ideal of Spanish and Latin American architecture was revived. What resulted was the Spanish Colonial Revival style, which was the predominant style in Southern California between 1915 and 1940, significantly altering the architectural landscape until the Modernist movement took hold during and after WWII. The style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. These may be of Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance inspirations, and an unusually rich and varied series of decorative precedents. The style employed a variety of floor plans, as well as gabled, cross-gabled, gabled and hipped, hipped and flat roof forms with parapets. Other character-defining features include Mission and Spanish clay tile, focal windows, arched windows and other openings, and accented entries.

The property minimally embodies the character-defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, exhibiting the following elements: asymmetrical façade, low-pitched mission half barrel roof, decorative corbels, covered porch with wood supports, stucco cladding, stucco chimney, and wood windows and doors. As a composition, the character-defining features combine to create a building that expresses the Spanish Colonial Revival style only in a limited way, even given the property's smaller size. As originally constructed, the property represents a minimal interpretation of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style and, through its purposeful simplicity, minimally embodies its distinctive characteristics. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion C.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style. Although staff's position is that the building was never a resource that embodied the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Colonial Revival style as required under Criterion C, the modifications, as detailed at the beginning of the analysis section of this report, impaired the building's limited expression of the style and resulted in a loss of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The replacement of the front door glazing with modern grilles between-the-glass windows is a highly visible alteration and somewhat impairs integrity. The front elevation entry railings feature Spanish-style scroll motifs, creating a false sense of history that detracts from the integrity of the building. The added bird blockers at the roof eaves are a contemporary feature that detracts from the otherwise simple roof design. The modern divided-lite casement windows added in 1998 in an altered opening to the south façade are visible from the street and detract from the fenestration's cohesion by exhibiting a higher sill height and a more complex design. At the north elevation, an original window opening was enlarged to accommodate a vinyl window. These modifications all impair integrity, although to a modest extent. The demolition of the original garage, construction of the new garage and pool, and alterations to the courtyard also impaired integrity. Considering the cumulative alterations, the majority of which are minor in nature, but many of which are highly visible, the property does not retain the integrity of design, materials, and workmanship.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

The subject property was built by established Master Builder Louise M. Severin, according to a 1933 *San Diego Union* newspaper article. Although the Notice of Completion identifies Hilmer T. Severin as the builder, previous historical reports have established Hilmer's role as a helper to Louise, while Louise was the one who estimated, contracted, designed, and supervised the building construction. As such, staff attributes the design and construction of the subject property to Louise Severin.

Louise Severin was born in Missouri in 1892 and moved to San Diego in the 1910s. She apprenticed in the construction trade and learned the necessary skills required to become a general contractor. Severin worked throughout the City of San Diego; however, it appears that her most mature period was spent in the Kensington and Talmadge areas. In the early 1920s, Louise Severin married Hilmer T. Severin, who assisted her in her construction business. During the 1930s, Severin exploited imagery of the region's Spanish and Mexican past, combining rustic and vernacular elements with the most up-to-date materials and methods. While not as sophisticated, the result was something akin to Cliff May's early Hacienda style houses, also found in the area. Currently, there are six known Severin-designed houses that are designated as historical resources within the City of San Diego: HRB #504 located at 4182 Rochester Road, HRB #623 located at 4185 Rochester Road, HRB #743 located at 4179 Norfolk Terrace, HRB #1029 located at 4970 Marlborough Drive, HRB #1116 located at 4170 Rochester Road, and HRB #1223 located at 4220 Norfolk Terrace. Five of these sites were designated under HRB Criterion D as notable works of Severin. She was active in the construction business from 1925 until her death in 1949.

Heritage Preservation staff identified three features on the subject property that are associated with Severin's design: gable-end fascia boards, rough troweled stucco, and a tapered stucco chimney with an inset. HRB Criterion Guidelines does not require that a property exhibit all, or even a majority, of a Master's "signature" design features to be eligible for designation under HRB Criterion D. However, Criterion D requires the property be representative of the notable work of the Master, as demonstrated in the nomination. Besides attributing the subject property to Severin, the historical report did not demonstrate that the property is representative of her notable work.

Compared to the six aforementioned historical resources built by Severin, the subject property has the simplest architectural expression that fails to represent Severin's notable work as a Master. The subject property is unique among historically designated Severin homes in that it features an extended tile shed roof over a front patio with wood supports. However, the wood supports are minimally articulated, and wall facades are minimally accentuated. Unlike other Severin-built homes, which contain a large picture window at the gable ends, the subject property's front gable window is a modest double-hung unit. Other original windows on the property are simple one-over-one double-hung or fixed units, unlike more embellished divided-lite windows seen on some Severin houses. The decorative corbels at gable ends are the only noteworthy details, as they are not seen on the other designated historic Severin homes. Still, compared to other Severin-built houses, the subject property is very simple in design and does not represent Severin's technical or aesthetic achievements as a Master Builder. Not all examples of a Master's work are eligible for designation under HRB Criterion D – the subject property would be one such example.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion D as a resource that represents the notable work of established Master Builder Louise M. Severin. Although staff's position is that the building was never a resource that represented a notable work of Severin, the property has suffered integrity loss as described under HRB Criterion C analysis above. Additionally, the loss of the original Severin rear courtyard and stucco walls has also contributed to integrity loss under HRB Criterion D, since Severin is known to include a walled courtyard area in her residential works. Thus, the property does not retain integrity and is not significant under HRB Criterion D, as it is not representative of the notable work of Master Builder Louise M. Severin. Therefore, staff does not recommend designating the subject property under HRB Criterion D.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the property located at 4804 Biona Drive not be designated under any HRB Criteria.



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Attachment(s):

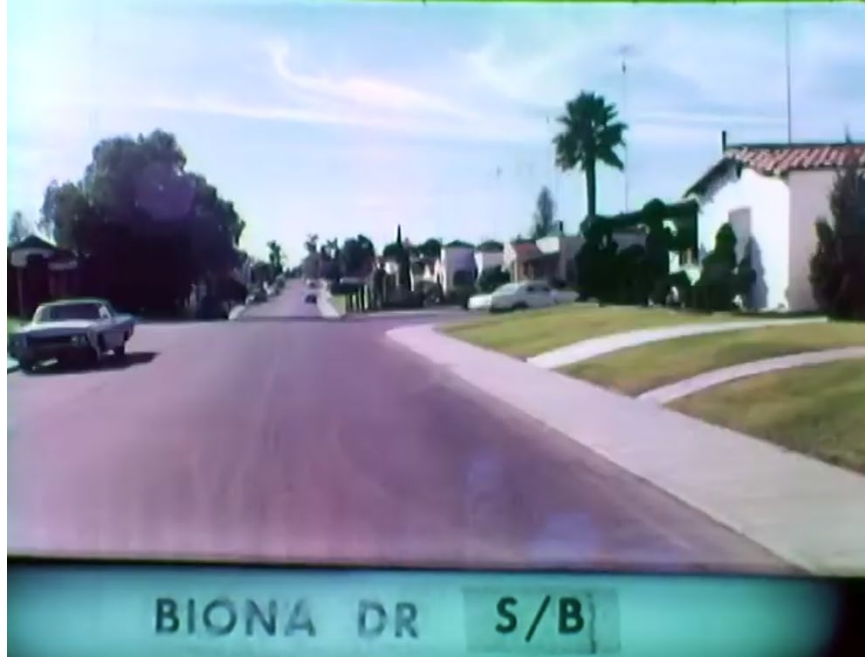
1. 4804 Biona Drive East Elevation, 1970 Street Video Frame
2. 4804 Biona Drive East Elevation, May 2026
3. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

Attachment 1

4804 Biona Drive, East Elevation

Transportation and Storm Water Department [1970 Street Video; Biona Drive Southbound](#)

Frame, full



Frame, cropped and gamma-adjusted, showing no window grille at this time



Attachment 2

4804 Biona Drive, East Elevation

May 2026 applicant photo showing non-original window grille removed

