[Commemorative Street Name Designation - “Emperor Norton Place” - 600 Block of Commercial Street]

Resolution adding the Commemorative Street Name “Emperor Norton Place” to the 600 block of Commercial Street in recognition of his contribution to San Francisco as a celebrated figure in American history.

WHEREAS, Emperor Norton, also known as Joshua A. Norton, was a historical figure who lived in San Francisco in the mid-19th century. He declared himself the Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico in 1859, and held this self-proclaimed title until his death in 1880; and

WHEREAS, Emperor Norton, is a celebrated example of individualism and eccentricity. He rejected the conventions of his time and created his own identity, challenging the norms and expectations of society. His unusual behavior, including issuing his own currency and decrees, inspired many people and made him a beloved figure in San Francisco; and

WHEREAS, Norton was born in England but spent most of his early life in South Africa. Leaving Cape Town, probably in late 1845, he arrived in San Francisco in late 1849, and subsequently lived in a boarding house called the Eureka Lodgings at 624 Commercial St., from 1863-1880; and

WHEREAS, For the first few years after arriving in San Francisco, Norton made a successful living as a commodities trader and real estate speculator. However, he was financially ruined following a failed bid to corner the rice market during a shortage prompted by a famine in China; and

WHEREAS, Norton had no formal political power; but nevertheless, was treated deferentially in San Francisco, and currency issued in his name was honored in some establishments that he frequented. Some considered Norton to be insane or eccentric, but
residents of San Francisco enjoyed his imperial presence and took note of his frequent newspaper proclamations; and

WHEREAS, On January 8, 1880, Norton collapsed at the corner of California and Dupont (now Grant Avenue) streets and died before he could be given medical treatment. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, upwards of 10,000 people lined the streets of San Francisco to pay him homage at his funeral; and

WHEREAS, Norton has been immortalized as the basis of characters in the literature of Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Christopher Moore, Morris and and René Goscinny, Selma Lagerlöf, Neil Gaiman, Mircea Cărtărescu and Charles Bukowski; and

WHEREAS, Today, Emperor Norton is a beloved figure in San Francisco, remembered as a humanitarian and visionary. He was known to advocate for equality for all minorities, extending the vote to women, and proposed the San Francisco and Oakland Bay Bridge, the Transbay Tube, the United Nations, and more; and

WHEREAS, Emperor Norton's legacy also highlights the importance of mental health and how society should treat those suffering from mental illness. His case is a reminder that mental health disorders should not be a source of shame or isolation, and that people with these disorders can still make significant contributions to their communities; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That to celebrate the legacy and contributions of Emperor Norton, there shall be an honorary naming of "Emperor Norton Place" on Commercial Street between Montgomery Street and Kearny Street; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Department of Public Works is directed to add the honorary street name to its official list of Commemorative Street Names in accordance with Public Works Code, Section 789 et seq.
Resolution adding the Commemorative Street Name "Emperor Norton Place" to the 600 block of Commercial Street in recognition of his contribution to San Francisco as a celebrated figure in American history.

April 03, 2023 Land Use and Transportation Committee - RECOMMENDED

April 12, 2023 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED
Ayes: 8 - Chan, Dorsey, Engardio, Mandelman, Peskin, Preston, Safai and Walton
Excused: 3 - Melgar, Ronen and Stefani

File No. 230230

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED on 4/12/2023 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

London N. Breed
Mayor

4/21/23 Date Approved