Resolution initiating a landmark designation under Article 10 of the Planning Code for 649-651 Duncan Street, the longtime home of pioneering lesbian activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin.

WHEREAS, Under Planning Code, Section 1004.1, the Board of Supervisors (Board) may by Resolution initiate landmark designation; and

WHEREAS, Dorothy “Del” Martin was born in San Francisco in 1921, studied journalism at UC Berkeley, transferred to San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) where she was managing editor of the student newspaper the Golden Gater until she was forced to drop out of school after the birth of her daughter, and moved to Seattle in 1949 to work as an editor; and

WHEREAS, Phyllis Lyon was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1924, moved with her family to the San Francisco Bay Area, graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in journalism, and moved to Seattle where she and Martin met while working in the same building; and

WHEREAS, In 1953, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin returned to San Francisco and lived together in the Castro through 1955; and

WHEREAS, In 1955, Lyon and Martin purchased a modest one-bedroom house at 651 Duncan Street, noting that their only requirement when searching for a home was a “house with a view”; and

WHEREAS, On September 21, 1955, four female couples, including Martin and Lyon, gathered in San Francisco to found the nation’s first lesbian rights organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB); and
WHEREAS, DOB was initially conceived as a social group where lesbians could meet without risk, because lesbians could be arrested for dancing in bars in the 1950s, as well as a forum for educating lesbians about homosexuality and promoting social acceptance; and

WHEREAS, In addition to major efforts like publishing a nationally-circulated newsletter (The Ladder) and hosting national conventions, the DOB in San Francisco hosted many social activities, including private parties at Lyon’s and Martin’s house on Duncan Street, where members socialized in the home’s living room and on the grass in the backyard, and women danced together in the dining room; and

WHEREAS, Private residences were the only places in San Francisco in the 1950s where lesbians could socialize freely together; and

WHEREAS, The main façade of the house was punctuated by a large picture window overlooking the city, which prompted some women to fear that neighbors would see them dancing together in the house and to suggest that the window be obscured by a curtain; and

WHEREAS, By the late 1960s, DOB was the only homophile organization in the country with local chapters and a strong national governing group; and

WHEREAS, In 1964, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, with sponsorship from the Glide Urban Center headquartered at Glide Memorial Methodist Church, helped found the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, the nation’s first homophile organization with religious support; and

WHEREAS, In 1964, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were instrumental in the founding of Citizens Alert, a citywide police watchdog program organized by leaders at the Glide Urban Center to expose the many cases of police brutality and unequal enforcement of the law; and

WHEREAS, In 1972, Lyon and Martin coauthored Lesbian/Woman, a highly influential volume describing lesbian lives in a confident, comprehensive, and knowledgeable way; and
WHEREAS, In 1975, Mayor George Moscone appointed Phyllis Lyon to the Human Rights Commission and Del Martin to the Commission on the Status of Women; and

WHEREAS, In 1976, Del Martin published *Battered Wives*, one of the earliest books on domestic violence published in the United States; and

WHEREAS, In 1995, Lyon and Martin were appointed delegates to the White House Conference on Aging; and

WHEREAS, In 2004, Lyon and Martin were the first same-sex couple to legally wed in San Francisco when Mayor Gavin Newsom ordered the City Clerk to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, Lyon and Martin were again the first same-sex couple to legally wed in San Francisco when the State Supreme Court established marriage equality; and

WHEREAS, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon resided at 651 Duncan Street continuously from 1955 until their deaths in 2008 and 2020, respectively; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board hereby initiates landmark designation of the longtime home of pioneering lesbian activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, located at 649-651 Duncan Street (Assessor’s Block/Lots 6604/036 and 6604/037); and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board requests that the Planning Department prepare a Landmark Designation Report to submit to the Historic Preservation Commission for its consideration of the special historical, architectural, and aesthetic interest and value of the property and existing house and structures; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board requests that the Historic Preservation Commission consider whether the property or existing structures warrant landmark designation, and submit its recommendation to the Board according to Article 10 of the Planning Code.
Resolution initiating a landmark designation under Article 10 of the Planning Code for 649-651 Duncan Street, the longtime home of pioneering lesbian activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin.

October 19, 2020 Land Use and Transportation Committee - RECOMMENDED AS COMMITTEE REPORT

October 20, 2020 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED
Ayes: 11 - Fewer, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Peskin, Preston, Ronen, Safai, Stefani, Walton and Yee

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED on 10/20/2020 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

London N. Breed
Mayor

Date Approved 10.30.20