


BOARD of SUPERVISORS



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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 10, 2023
To: Carla Short, Interim Director, Public Works
From:  Angela Calvillo, Clerk of the Board, Office of the Clerk of the Board
Subject: Commemorative Street Name Designation - "Emperor Norton Place" - 600 Block of Commercial Street (File No. 230230)

On April 12, 2023, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 170-23, sponsored by Supervisors Peskin, Mandelman, and Chan and enacted by Mayor London N. Breed on April 21, 2023.

A copy of the Resolution is being submitted to pursuant to Resolution No. 170-23.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Erica Major, Assistant Clerk, at (415) 554-4441 or by email at: Erica.Major@sfgov.org.

cc: David Steinberg, Public Works
Ian Schneider, Public Works
John Thomas, Public Works
Lena Liu, Public Works
Jason Wong, Public Works

1 [Commemorative Street Name Designation - "Emperor Norton Place" - 600 Block of
2 Commercial Street]

3 **Resolution adding the Commemorative Street Name "Emperor Norton Place" to the 600**
4 **block of Commercial Street in recognition of his contribution to San Francisco as a**
5 **celebrated figure in American history.**

6
7 WHEREAS, Emperor Norton, also known as Joshua A. Norton, was a historical figure
8 who lived in San Francisco in the mid-19th century. He declared himself the Emperor of the
9 United States and Protector of Mexico in 1859, and held this self-proclaimed title until his
10 death in 1880; and

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

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

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

23 WHEREAS, Norton had no formal political power; but nevertheless, was treated
24 deferentially in San Francisco, and currency issued in his name was honored in some
25 establishments that he frequented. Some considered Norton to be insane or eccentric, but

1 residents of San Francisco enjoyed his imperial presence and took note of his frequent
2 newspaper proclamations; and

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

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

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

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

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

22 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Department of Public Works is directed to add the
23 honorary street name to its official list of Commemorative Street Names in accordance with
24 Public Works Code, Section 789 et seq.



City and County of San Francisco

Tails
Resolution

City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

File Number: 230230

Date Passed: April 12, 2023

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