

1 [Urging the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency to Preserve the Historic  
2 Character of the Van Ness Corridor]

3 **Resolution urging the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency to make all**  
4 **efforts to preserve the historic character of the Van Ness Corridor through reuse as**  
5 **well as replication of the Van Ness Avenue historic streetlamps.**

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7 WHEREAS, The 259 historic trolley poles and streetlamps that run the length of Van  
8 Ness Avenue were constructed in preparation for the 1915 Panama Pacific International  
9 Exposition and moved in 1936 for a Works Progress Administration (WPA) road-widening  
10 project to inaugurate the Golden Gate Bridge; and

11 WHEREAS, The graceful ironwork brackets and lamps that have lined Van Ness  
12 Avenue since the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge are known as the “Ribbon of Light” and  
13 the “geographic marker” that defines the two miles of Highway 101 from Market Street to Bay  
14 Street; and

15 WHEREAS, 33 of the trolley poles and streetlamps are located on streets within the  
16 Article 10 Civic Center Historic District (Fell Street to Golden Gate Avenue) and 16 of these  
17 are located within the Civic Center National Historic Landmark District (between Grove and  
18 McAllister); and

19 WHEREAS, An architectural survey conducted by San Francisco Heritage in 1982  
20 rated the Van Ness Avenue trolley poles and streetlamps “level B (major importance)”; and

21 WHEREAS, In conjunction with the proposed Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)  
22 Project, a 2009 study by the San Francisco Department of Public Works (Public Works)  
23 concluded that the 1914 Beaux Arts trolley poles and streetlamps are not eligible historic  
24 resources primarily because the concrete poles lacked sufficient historical and structural  
25 integrity; and

1           WHEREAS, Despite the 2009 Public Works report’s conclusion that the trolley poles  
2 and streetlamps are not historic, the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission added  
3 the “Van Ness Avenue Trolley Poles and Light Standards” to the Planning Department’s  
4 Landmark Designation Work Program for future consideration as a San Francisco City  
5 Landmark on March 29, 2011, with nearly all research having been completed for the  
6 nomination; and

7           WHEREAS, The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA)  
8 presentations in public outreach materials and at public information meetings for the Van  
9 Ness BRT Project Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Environmental Impact Statement  
10 (EIS), did not sufficiently indicate plans for destruction of the trolley poles, lamps, and  
11 brackets; and

12           WHEREAS, The feasibility of reusing the cast iron light standards and bases with  
13 compatible replacement poles has not been evaluated as part of the environmental review  
14 process for the Van Ness BRT Project; and

15           WHEREAS, SFMTA is currently developing a treatment plan for retention as well as  
16 replication of four of the historic trolley poles, lamps, and brackets situated within the Civic  
17 Center National Historic Landmark District, the remaining 255 lamps on the 22 blocks of Van  
18 Ness Avenue outside of the Civic Center are slated for removal as early as Fall 2016; and

19           WHEREAS, A group of civic leaders, neighborhood associations, and preservationists,  
20 including San Francisco Beautiful, San Francisco Heritage, and the Victorian Alliance of San  
21 Francisco have formed the Coalition to Save the Historic Streetlamps of Van Ness Avenue  
22 (“Coalition”); and

23           WHEREAS, The Van Ness Avenue Historic Streetlamps have been nominated to the  
24 National Trust for Historic Preservation’s 2016 list of “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic  
25 Places” to be nationally announced in October 2016; and

1           WHEREAS, Reuse as well as replication of the Van Ness Avenue Historic Streetlamps  
2 would provide the architectural framework and historical continuity for new development along  
3 the entire Van Ness Corridor, and celebrate civic pride to unite old and new San Francisco;  
4 and

5           WHEREAS, The City has a policy and practice of retaining or replicating historic  
6 streetlamps where appropriate, including examples on Market Street, the Golden Triangle,  
7 Octavia Boulevard, Divisadero Street, Dolores Street, Lower Fillmore, and The Embarcadero;  
8 and

9           WHEREAS, The SFMTA Van Ness Improvement staff is currently conducting a  
10 reassessment of whether reusing existing components on new poles is feasible, with  
11 consideration of project standards and specifications, due to be complete in September 2016;  
12 and

13           WHEREAS, On August 16, 2016, the SFMTA Board of Directors approved a contract  
14 with Walsh Construction for Phase 2 of the Van Ness Corridor project that could include  
15 demolition or other work that might preclude or impede the reuse of the streetlamps and  
16 fittings; now, therefore, be it

17           RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors joins the Coalition in calling  
18 for SFMTA to make all efforts to preserve the historic character of the Van Ness Corridor  
19 through reuse as well as replication of the Van Ness Avenue Historic Streetlamps; and, be it

20           FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors calls on SFMTA  
21 to fully explore the costs and technical feasibility of reuse as well as replication of the Van  
22 Ness Avenue Historic Streetlamps, including feasibility of retaining the cast iron fittings and  
23 lamps mounted on compatible replacement poles; and, be it

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1           FURTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors calls on SFMTA  
2 to halt any actions that would endanger the Van Ness Avenue Historic Streetlamps before any  
3 requisite studies and reviews have been completed; and, be it

4           FUTHER RESOLVED, That the San Francisco Board of Supervisors directs the Clerk  
5 of the Board to transmit this resolution to the SFMTA Board of Directors and SFMTA upon  
6 final passage.

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