

1 [Planning Code - Landmark Designation Amendment - 429-431 Castro Street (the Castro
2 Theatre)]

3 **Ordinance amending the Landmark Designation for Landmark No. 100, 429-431 Castro**
4 **Street (the Castro Theatre), Assessor's Parcel Block No. 3582, Lot No. 085, under**
5 **Article 10 of the Planning Code, to list the exterior features that should be preserved or**
6 **replaced in kind, to add interior features to the designation, and to capture the**
7 **property's full historical significance; affirming the Planning Department's**
8 **determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making public**
9 **necessity, convenience, and welfare findings under Planning Code, Section 302, and**
10 **findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of**
11 **Planning Code, Section 101.1.**

12 NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncodified text** are in plain Arial font.
13 **Additions to Codes** are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.
14 **Deletions to Codes** are in *strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*.
15 **Board amendment additions** are in double-underlined Arial font.
16 **Board amendment deletions** are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.
17 **Asterisks (* * * *)** indicate the omission of unchanged Code
18 subsections or parts of tables.

19 Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

20 Section 1. CEQA and Land Use Findings.

21 (a) The Planning Department has determined that the actions contemplated in this
22 ordinance comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public Resources
23 Code Sections 21000 *et seq.*). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the Board of
24 Supervisors in File No. _____230192 and is incorporated herein by reference. The
25 Board of Supervisors affirms this determination.

(b) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board of Supervisors finds that the
proposed amendment to the landmark designation of 429-431 Castro Street, situated within

1 Assessor’s Parcel Block No. 3582, Lot No. 085 (“Castro Theatre”), will serve the public
2 necessity, convenience, and welfare for the reasons set forth in Historic Preservation
3 Commission Resolution No. _____1303, recommending approval of the proposed
4 amended designation, which is incorporated herein by reference.

5 (c) On February 1, 2023 , the Historic Preservation Commission, in Resolution No.
6 _____1303, adopted findings that the actions contemplated in this ordinance are
7 consistent, on balance, with the City’s General Plan and with the eight priority policies of
8 Planning Code Section 101.1. The Board adopts these findings as its own.

9
10 Section 2. General Findings.

11 (a) On May 24, 2022, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 249-22,
12 initiating amendment of the landmark designation of the Castro Theatre pursuant to Section
13 1004.1 of the Planning Code. On June 3, 2022, the Mayor approved the resolution. Said
14 resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. 220550.

15 (b) Pursuant to Charter Section 4.135, the Historic Preservation Commission has
16 authority "to recommend approval, disapproval, or modification of landmark designations and
17 historic district designations under the Planning Code to the Board of Supervisors."

18 (c) Ordinance No. 355-77, enacted in 1977, designated the Castro Theatre (then 429
19 Castro Street), as Landmark No. 100. That ordinance, which is incorporated herein by
20 reference but amended in accordance with Sections 3 and 4, required that the particular
21 features to be preserved include those “included in the [the Landmarks Preservation Advisory
22 Board] resolution,” which it “incorporated herein and made a part hereof as though fully set
23 forth”. The referenced resolution, Resolution No. 152 of the Landmarks Preservation Advisory
24 Board, stated “That the said Landmark should be preserved generally in all of its particular
25 exterior features as existing on the date hereof and as described and depicted in the

1 photographs, case report and other material on file in the Department of City Planning Docket
2 LM 76.10,” but it did not list those features in any detail. Moreover, those features refer only to
3 the building’s exterior. The resolution did not include any of the building’s interior character-
4 defining features as part of the landmark designation.

5 (d) The Landmark Designation Fact Sheet prepared for this landmarking amendment
6 was authored by Planning Department Preservation staff. All preparers meet the Secretary of
7 the Interior’s Professional Qualification Standards for historic preservation program staff, as
8 set forth in Code of Federal Regulations Title 36, Part 61, Appendix A. The report was
9 reviewed for accuracy and conformance with the purposes and standards of Article 10 of the
10 Planning Code.

11 (e) The Historic Preservation Commission, at its regular meeting of February 1, 2023,
12 reviewed Planning Department staff’s analysis of the historical significance of the Castro
13 Theatre set forth in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet dated February 1, 2023.

14 (f) On February 1, 2023, after holding a public hearing on the proposed landmark
15 designation update and having considered the specialized analysis prepared by Planning
16 Department staff and the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, the Historic Preservation
17 Commission recommended amending the landmark designation of the Castro Theatre under
18 Article 10 of the Planning Code by Resolution No. _____1303. Said resolution is on file
19 with the Clerk of the Board in File No. _____230192.

20 (g) The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that the Castro Theatre has a special
21 character and special historical, architectural, and aesthetic interest and value, and that its
22 designation as a Landmark will further the purposes of and conform to the standards set forth
23 in Article 10 of the Planning Code. In doing so, the Board hereby incorporates by reference
24 the findings of the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet.

1 Section 3. Auditorium Seating Findings.

2 (a) Inclusion of fixed theatrical seating configured in the movie-palace style as
3 character-defining interior features is warranted because these features relate to the Castro
4 Theatre’s architectural, historical, and cultural significance

5 (b) Movie palaces were often constructed by prominent architects and designers to
6 showcase film in a highly stylized environment where the ambiance itself was part of the
7 entertainment. The high merit of architectural and interior design was a concerted attempt to
8 mirror the fantasy realm of the screen. Movie palaces included lavish auditoriums and other
9 features to support a luxurious movie going experience.

10 (c) The auditorium seating constitutes a defining characteristic of the space as a
11 historic cinema, configured in classic movie palace fashion in gently curved rows. The seats
12 on the orchestra (main floor) level are affixed to a raked floor, and the sweep of the seating
13 across the orchestra and the balcony not only creates a visual ambiance which immediately
14 marks the space as a grand movie theater but also provides excellent sight lines for viewing
15 films and live performances.

16 (d) Architect Timothy Pflueger’s original 1922 interior drawings, as well as early interior
17 photos, indicate auditorium-style seating consistent with the present-day configuration,
18 including three sections (left, center, and right) divided by two aisles and flanked by two exit
19 aisles, with the number of rows, seats per row, and total number of seats comparable to the
20 present day configuration.

21 (e) As described in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, the distinctive configuration
22 of the seats is linked to the theatre’s cultural identity as the setting where notable directors,
23 actors, musicians, writers, community leaders, and others have made substantive
24 contributions to LGBTQ community building.

1 (f) In 2001, the Theatre was upgraded to include new auditorium seats in movie-palace
2 style, among other improvements. These changes were carried out with respect for the
3 original style and function of the space. As a result, the venue continued to retain a high
4 degree of integrity, though adapted in a manner to support the contemporary events and
5 needs. The orchestra continues to mark the Castro Theatre as a classic movie palace. The
6 raked floors and sloping aisles are original; although the new seats were installed later, they
7 fall within the second period of significance identified in this landmark designation. In-person
8 testimonials have documented the linkages of these features with the intangible cultural
9 heritage of the space, and how the configuration lended to community building, audience
10 participation, cultural production, and personal meaning for theater goers. Direct exchanges
11 were regularly made between the stage and house and numerous directors, actors,
12 musicians, writers and community leaders took their places on the seats before being called
13 up to the stage for events.

14
15 Section 34. Amendment of Landmark Designation.

16 (a) Pursuant to Section 1004.3 of the Planning Code, the Landmark Designation for
17 429-431 Castro Street (Castro Theatre), Assessor's Block No. 3582, Lot No. 085, is hereby
18 amended as specified in Section 4 of this ordinance.

19 (b) Appendix A to Article 10 of the Planning Code is hereby amended with respect to
20 Landmark No. 100, to indicate that Landmark No. 100 has been amended by this ordinance.

21 (c) In the event there is a conflict between the landmark designation in this ordinance
22 and the landmark designation in Ordinance No. 355-77, the provisions of this ordinance shall
23 prevail.

24
25 Section 45. Required Data.

1 (a) The description, location, and boundary of the Landmark site consists of the city
2 parcel located at 429-431 Castro Street (Castro Theatre), in Assessor’s Parcel Block No.
3 3582, Lot No. 085, in San Francisco’s Castro/Upper Market neighborhood.

4 (b) The characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation are described and
5 shown in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet and other supporting materials contained in
6 Planning Department Record Docket No. 2022-006075DES. In brief, the Castro Theatre is
7 eligible for local designation as it is associated with events that have made a culturally and
8 historically significant contribution to the broad patterns of San Francisco history and
9 architecturally it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of
10 construction and represents the work of an architect of merit. Built in 1922 – a century ago –
11 the Castro Theatre is the oldest and longest continually operating single-screen movie house
12 in San Francisco, and the most ornate of San Francisco’s extant movie palaces. It is
13 considered the flagship theater of the Nasser Family, San Francisco’s oldest movie business
14 family. An early work of renowned Bay Area architect Timothy Pflueger, the Castro Theatre
15 was the first theatre he designed and is considered one of his most iconic pieces of work. The
16 theatre anchored early commercial development in the Eureka Valley neighborhood, now
17 known as the Castro. Since the mid-1970s, the Castro Theatre has maintained a deep
18 tradition of LGBTQ programming, including the world’s largest and longest-running LGBTQ
19 film festival.

20 (c) The particular features that should be preserved, or replaced in-kind as determined
21 necessary, are those shown in photographs and/or described in the Landmark Designation
22 Fact Sheet, which can be found in Planning Department Record Docket No. 2022-
23 006075DES, and which are incorporated in this designation by reference as though fully set
24 forth herein. Specifically, the following features are character-defining and shall be preserved
25 or replaced in kind:

1 (1) Exterior form, massing, structure, architectural ornament, and materials of
2 the Castro Theatre, identified as:

- 3 (A) Overall form and massing;
- 4 (B) Concrete construction;
- 5 (C) Use of the Spanish-Colonial style on the theater’s stuccoed west
6 façade;
- 7 (D) West façade vertical blade sign profile, lettering, neon lighting, and
8 banding;
- 9 (E) Central west façade marque profile, lettering, neon lighting, and
10 banding;
- 11 (F) Central bay arched mullioned wood window;
- 12 (G) Two-leaf, mullioned windows in flanking bays;
- 13 (H) Tile-clad freestanding ticket booth in recessed arcade with poster
14 cases, glazed tile art, and unglazed tile walkway;
- 15 (I) Glazed wood entry doors (five pairs);
- 16 (J) Presence of storefronts flanking theatre lobby entrance; and
- 17 (K) West façade glazed tile bulkheads.

18 (2) The character-defining interior features of the Castro Theatre are those
19 depicted in photos and written description in the Landmark Designation Fact Sheet, all of
20 which have been accessible to the public, including:

- 21 (A) Lobby space featuring coffered ceiling, wood paneled doors to
22 auditorium and to office space, mirrors, and chandeliers;
- 23 (B) Stairs to the mezzanine on both north and south sides of the lobby;
- 24 (C) Mezzanine balcony with stepped floor and presence of seating,
25 including the original 1922 fixed seats;

1 (D) Vast interior auditorium volume with raked floor, aisles, and
2 ~~presence of seating~~ fixed theatrical seating configured in the movie-palace style;

3 (E) Cast-plaster auditorium ceiling;

4 (F) Classically inspired sgraffito murals;

5 (G) Organ screens on stage return walls;

6 (H) Corinthian-pilaster framed proscenium;

7 (I) Art-deco metal auditorium chandelier;

8 (J) Presence of stage with organist lift;

9 (K) Mezzanine lobby space featuring wall niches, a barrel- and rib
10 vaulted ceiling with chandeliers, and stenciled borders;

11 (L) Ramps from mezzanine lobby to mezzanine; and

12 (M) Art-deco drinking fountain in lobby against glazed tile wall.

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15 Section 56. Effective Date.

16 This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after enactment. Enactment occurs
17 when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the ordinance unsigned or does not
18 sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board of Supervisors overrides the
19 Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

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21 APPROVED AS TO FORM:
22 DAVID CHIU, City Attorney

23 By: /s/ Peter R. Miljanich
24 Peter R. Miljanich
Deputy City Attorney

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