

1 [Urging Expanded Free Access to Property Information Records]

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3 **Resolution urging the Assessor-Recorder to eliminate pay-gates and other barriers to**
4 **public access to all recorded and property information records in the City and County**
5 **of San Francisco.**
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7 WHEREAS, San Francisco, through the Office of the Assessor-Recorder maintains and
8 makes available public records pertaining to all real property in the City and County of San
9 Francisco, and is an important source of public information pertaining to property ownership
10 and other relevant information regarding property in the City and County of San Francisco;
11 and

12 WHEREAS, Property ownership records serve multiple public purposes, including
13 during emergencies when non-resident property owners need to be contacted, and/or for
14 monitoring the transfer of properties and providing appropriate notice to residential and
15 commercial tenants of changes in ownership, and/or when community members are seeking
16 to contact property owners about persistent blight, and/or when intervention is needed to
17 resolve conflicts between building owners, managers and occupants; and

18 WHEREAS, Property ownership records also serve a valuable purpose in allowing City
19 officials and members of the public to research the consolidation of property ownership,
20 particularly as private equity firms have become the dominant form of financial backing among
21 the nation's largest owners of multifamily buildings, the top 35 of which, including Blackstone,
22 Greystar, and Lone Star Funds, collectively own roughly a million apartments; and

23 WHEREAS, Speculation concerning consolidation of property ownership in San
24 Francisco - including the role that absentee property owners and private equity firms play in
25 contributing to approximately 40,000 vacant residential units according to a 2022 Policy

1 Analysis by San Francisco's Budget & Legislative Analyst - has in turn fueled speculation
2 regarding the role of international money-laundering operations in San Francisco's real estate
3 market; and

4 WHEREAS, As efforts are made to identify assets held by the international billionaire
5 class, particularly in the context of increased pressure to seize or otherwise leverage assets
6 owned by Russian oligarchs during the Russian invasion of sovereign Ukraine, news
7 publications and members of the public have been challenged by pay-gates and other
8 technological barriers to quickly accessing information pertaining to property ownership; and

9 WHEREAS, California Government Code Section 27366 delegates authority, but does
10 not require, California counties to set fees for copies of official records in an amount
11 necessary to recover the direct and indirect costs of providing the product or service; and

12 WHEREAS, While California Government Code specifically exempts from online
13 disclosure records including the home address or telephone number of elected or appointed
14 officials, it does not otherwise restrict free and immediate access to recorded property
15 information; and

16 WHEREAS, Copies of recorded documents, including deeds and liens, can currently
17 be ordered from the Assessor-Recorder's Office online, by drop box, or by mail, at a cost of
18 three dollars per page for pages one through three and 50 cents for each page thereafter, and
19 a certification fee of one dollar per document; and

20 WHEREAS, Beginning with Fiscal Year 2018-2019, the Assessor-Recorder's Office
21 has been the subject of a major Information Technology initiative to modernize the
22 department's property assessment and tax system, including the design and implementation
23 of a new system to replace the Department's former, obsolete Recorder Information System;
24 and

1 WHEREAS, Building on these recent improvements, the Assessor-Recorder has
2 recently committed to improving upon the Department's public-facing database of public
3 records pertaining to property ownership and other matters of public interest; now, therefore,
4 be it

5 RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors urges the Office of the Assessor-Recorder
6 to expand its efforts, along with the Committee on Information Technology, to expeditiously
7 provide immediate and remote digital public access to deeds, liens and other recorded public
8 records, and eliminate costs for viewing said public records to the maximum extent feasible.
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