

1 [Initiating Landmark Designation - Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin House]

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3 **Resolution initiating a landmark designation under Article 10 of the Planning Code for**
4 **649-651 Duncan Street, the longtime home of pioneering lesbian activists Phyllis Lyon**
5 **and Del Martin.**

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

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

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

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

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

22 WHEREAS, On September 21, 1955, four female couples, including Martin and Lyon,
23 gathered in San Francisco to found the nation’s first lesbian rights organization, the Daughters
24 of Bilitis (DOB); and

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1 WHEREAS, DOB was initially conceived as a social group where lesbians could meet
2 without risk, because lesbians could be arrested for dancing in bars in the 1950s, as well as a
3 forum for educating lesbians about homosexuality and promoting social acceptance; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

21 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board requests that the Historic Preservation
22 Commission consider whether the property or existing structures warrant landmark
23 designation, and submit its recommendation to the Board according to Article 10 of the
24 Planning Code.