SAN FRANCISCO LIBRARY COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. 2010-01

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT AND URGING THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION TO ADOPT RESOLUTIONS TO INITIATE LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR THE MARINA BRANCH LIBRARY AND REJECT THE LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR THE NORTH BEACH BRANCH LIBRARY.

WHEREAS, On October 7, 2009, the Historic Preservation Commission initiated landmark designation and/or multiple property listing designation for seven libraries designed by Appleton & Wolfard (the North Beach, Marina, Eureka Valley, Western Addition, and Excelsior branches as well as the Merced and Parkside branches once their renovations are complete); and

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Public Library, through the Branch Library Improvement Program (BLIP) is preserving and restoring 16 historic city library buildings with sensitivity to architecture, history, and function; and

WHEREAS, The BLIP has a track record of award winning library restorations and has received four awards to date including an AIA Special Achievement Award, the Governor's Historic Preservation award and a California Preservation Foundation Design Award for the Noe Valley project, and a Historic Preservation Award from the American Public Works Association for the Richmond project; and

WHEREAS, The current North Beach Branch Library building needs extensive work including seismic bracing, systems upgrades and due to the grade differential and multiple floor levels, significant ADA work; and

WHEREAS, The Mayor's Office on Disability found that the North Beach branch has substantial barriers for people with mobilities disabilities and in order to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, all public library

programs for children and adults are being held at a location outside of the library in order to make them fully accessible to all users; and

WHEREAS, The library studied renovating the existing building, but found that meeting building codes would result in less usable library space than the current branch provides and that an expansion would displace existing park amenities; and

WHEREAS, The North Beach Branch Library is the only Appleton & Wolfard designed library that has interior stairs and multiple floor levels, lacks windows on its park facing façade, is not set back from the street, and was placed in a constrained location; and

WHEREAS, After an extensive community Master Planning process in collaboration with the Recreation and Parks Department, on September 4, 2008 the Library Commission endorsed, pending the certification of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), the North Beach Branch Library and Joe DiMaggio Playground Master Plan which calls for a new North Beach Branch library to be built at 701 Lombard and the existing branch demolished and the land returned to park use; and

WHEREAS, Craig Hartman, FAIA, the peer review architect for the North Beach project described the existing branch as having an "introverted cramped and dark interior" and "unfriendly blank walls, a confusing, single entry and undistinguished architectural details and massing." He went on to urge the HPC to "... not elevate the North Beach Branch Library to landmark status.....as this building does not rise to the level of historic importance. Listing projects lacking in merit greatly diminish the importance of Historic Landmark Designation in San Francisco." (Letter dated 9/14/09); and

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) noted that "Removing the existing library and improving the

quality of open space within Joe DiMaggio Playground honors the history of the park, supports sustainable urbanism, and allows an important new library to move forward" and urged "...the Historic Preservation Commission not initiate designation of the North Beach Branch Library." They went on to say that "It is important to reserve Historic Landmark Designation for the most important and worthy structures, so that we can preserve the best of our history while enabling the city to continue to fulfill its other important policy objectives." (Letter dated 9/15/09); and

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Public Library concurs with the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association, noted architect Craig Hartman, and others in recommending that only civic buildings worthy of historic significance, such as the already landmarked Richmond, Noe Valley, Sunset, Presidio and Golden Gate Valley libraries, achieve landmark designation; and

WHEREAS, The Planning Department, in their Landmark Designation Case Report (dated 9/16/09, Case Number 2008.0968L) recommended that the HPC not initiate designation for the North Beach Branch as a local landmark as they believe "that the opportunity to return the site to open space use and improve the quality of the open space within Joe DiMaggio Playground will be more beneficial to the North Beach neighborhood than the retention of the existing library"; and

WHEREAS, The Planning Department, in their Landmark Designation Case Report (dated May 19, 2010) recommends that the HPC adopt a resolution to reject designation of the North Beach Branch Library as a City landmark because the demolition of the library and the construction of a new library are currently under evaluation in a soon to be published Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and, as part of this process, the project and alternatives to the project will be vetted by the public, the HPC, and the Planning Commission, and

the Department wishes to maintain the greatest flexibility in order to fully evaluate the project against all Planning policies and quality-of-life issues associated with the project; and

WHEREAS, The San Francisco Public Library concurs with the recommendations of the Planning Department to initiate landmark designation for the Marina, Eureka Valley/Harvey Milk Memorial, Parkside, and Merced Branch Libraries and not the North Beach Branch Library; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Library Commission concurs with the Planning Department and urges the Historic Preservation Commission to not designate the North Beach Branch Library as a landmark for the reasons set forth in this Resolution and the Planning Department staff reports; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Library Commission concurs with the Planning Department and urges the Historic Preservation Commission to recommend to the Board of Supervisors to adopt an ordinance to grant the landmark designation of the Marina Branch Library.

Approved on May 20, 2010

By a vote of 5-0

Sue Blackman
Library Commission Secretary