

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

RE: ORDER OF THE BOARD OF ALDERS designating the corner of Wooster Street and Brown Street to "Frank and Filomena Pepe Corner."

Submitted by: Alder Ellen Cupo, Ward 8

REPORT: 1666-03

ADVICE: Request required submission materials

BACKGROUND

This request comes from the Board of Alders regarding an ordinance to designate the corner of Wooster Street and Brown Street to "Frank and Filomena Pepe Corner." According to Section 18-2(a)(3) of Title III, Chapter 18, Article I of the City's Code requires,

"Each submission shall contain:

- (i) Plan of the site of the proposed location indicating all structures and street features as well as the proposed signage drawn to scale for review by the city.**
- (ii) Proposed wording of the signage.**
- (iii) A petition of at least two hundred fifty (250) city resident signatures in favor of the proposed naming, of which at least two-thirds (2/3 (one hundred sixty-six ((166))) shall be residents of the neighborhood of the proposed sign location."**

Alder Ellen Cupo and Representative Rosa DeLauro have submitted to the Board of Alders the attached Order proposing that the corner of Wooster Street and Brown Street be designated as "Frank and Filomena Pepe Corner" to honor the 100th anniversary of Frank Pepe's Pizzeria on Wooster Street and their significant contributions to creating New Haven-style pizza or "apizza."

History

New Haven-style pizza, locally referred to as "apizza," originated in New Haven in 1925 at Frank Pepe's Pizzeria, 157 Wooster Street. Frank Pepe immigrated to America as a teenager in 1909; and after returning to Italy for a few years to fight in World War I he returned to New Haven to work in a pasta factory and then in a bakery on Wooster Street. While working at the bakery, Pepe started making his version of the classic "apizza" pronounced "A-beets," a style of pizza from his hometown of Naples and selling his "tomato pies," walking through the Wooster Square market with several pies perched atop his head. He eventually saved enough money to buy a wagon and continued selling the increasingly popular "apizza." In June of 1925, Frank Pepe took over the bakery's operation and established "Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana" on Wooster Street; and the rest, as they say, was history.

Filomena Pepe was a partner to Frank and his greatest supporter; and unlike her husband Filomena could speak and write in English, so she was invaluable in establishing and growing the business. She took care of all administrative tasks and other things requiring such knowledge.

True to his humble roots, Frank Pepe's restaurant first sold just two types of 'apizza' one

with tomatoes, grated pecorino cheese, garlic, oregano, and olive oil, and a second that also had anchovy. The original tomato pie is still offered today, and anchovy continues to be available as an added topping. Like many small business owners of the day, Frank and Filomena lived in an apartment above the pizzeria; and they had two daughters, Elizabeth and Serafina, who worked with their parents downstairs at the pizzeria. Frank Pepe became known as “Old Reliable” for his contributions to the neighborhood and for his unwavering love of his growing extended family. Having established one of the first pizzerias in the country, Frank passed away in 1969; and in the late 1970s Elizabeth and Seravina purchased the old bakery next door from the Boccamiello family and opened it as Frank Pepe’s The Spot, an annex to the main building.

In honor of Frank and Filomena Pepe’s contributions to the creation of New Haven style pizza, “apizza” the corner of Wooster Street and Brown Street is designated as “Frank and Filomena Pepe Corner,” making their legacy in New Haven officially permanent in perpetuity.

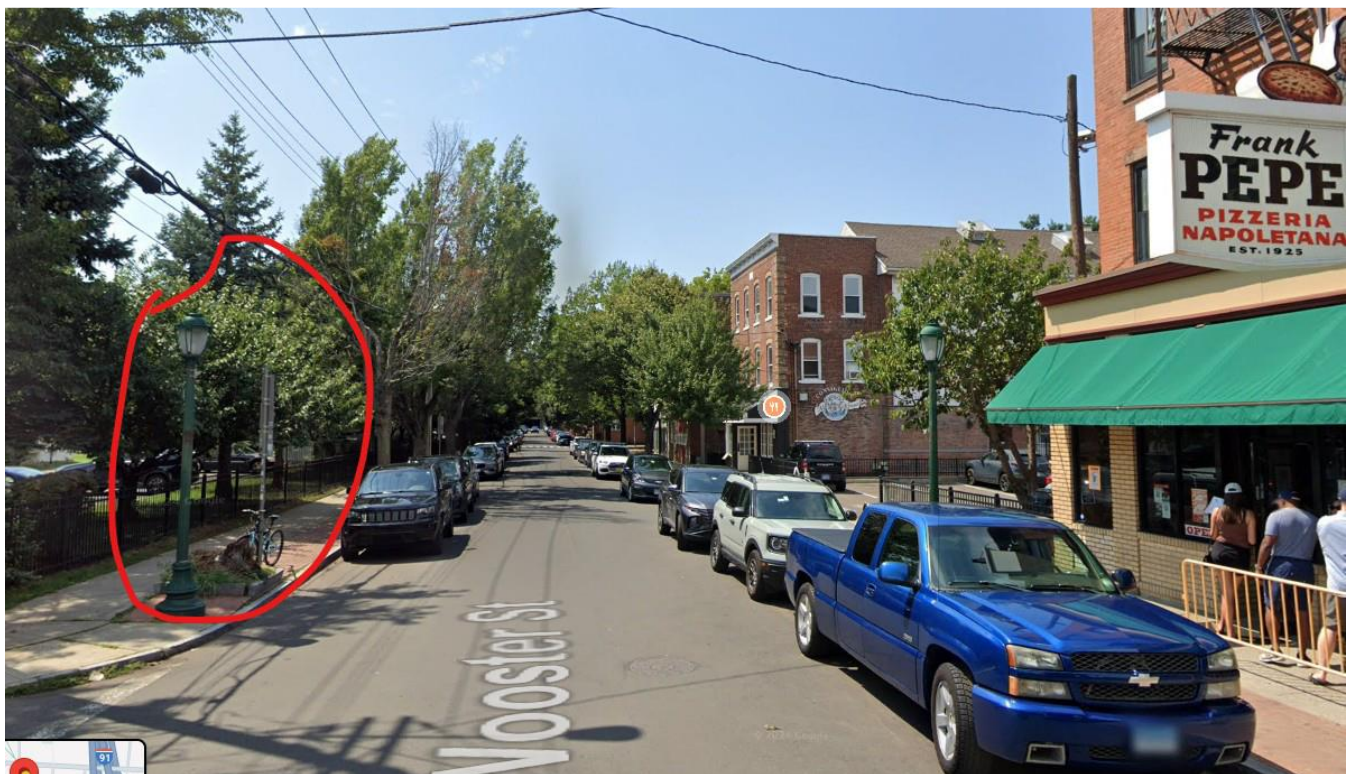
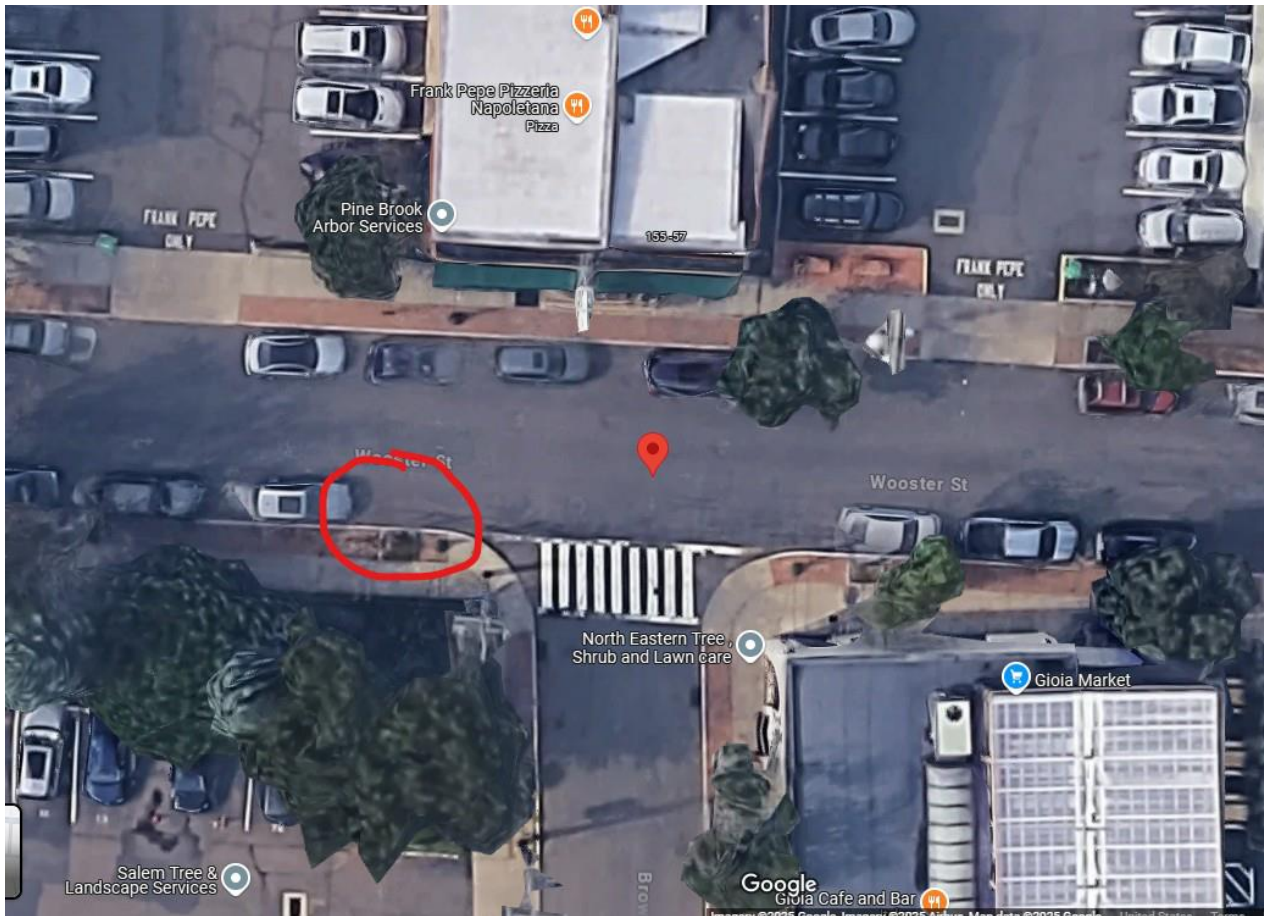
PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

This proposal in accordance with Title I, Article XIII, Section 2(A) of the New Haven Code of Ordinances states, **"Every Ordinance or Resolution of the Board of Alders relating to the location and use of any street, bridge, boulevard, esplanade, square, park, playground, playfield, aviation field, parking space, public building, the facilities or terminals of any public utility, or the establishment or change in the boundaries of or regulations concerning zoning, shall be at once referred to the City Planning Commission and final action shall not be taken on any such Ordinance or Resolution until the commission shall have reported thereon, provided that the Board of Alders may establish by ordinance a period of not less than sixty (60) Days within which the commission shall file its report with the City Clerk and if no report is filed within such period the approval of the commission shall be presumed."** Accordingly, the Board of Alders seeks guidance regarding the proposed amendment.

The Board of Alder seeks guidance as to:

- Whether the proposal is aligned with the City’s Comprehensive Plan.
- Whether the proposal is “complete” and meets the criteria set forth in Section 18-2(a)(3) of Title III, Chapter 18, Article I of the City Code.

The sign is proposed to be placed at the corner of Wooster and Brown Streets so it is highly visible to those in line at Pepe’s and will read “Frank and Filomena Pepe Corner.” The applicant has provided Google street view and ariel photos showing the signs location. The signature pages provided in this referral have been counted by staff and appear to be short of the 250 needed per General Code of Ordinance Section 18-2(a)(3)(iii). The ordinance requires 250 total signatures from New Haven residents, of which 166 must be from residents in the neighborhood the sign will be placed in. A gross total of 179 signatures have been counted across all sheets. Some of which these signatures are not applicable for being associated with addresses outside of New Haven.



ADVICE

The proposal is aligned with the City's Comprehensive Plan because it:

- Fosters a greater "sense of place" and neighborhood pride.
- Celebrates New Haven food and culture and promotes tourism.

However, prior to the Board of Alders rendering any decisions, the Planning Commission suggests having the applicant meet Section 18-2(a)(3) of the City Code by providing the following as required:

- (i) Plan of the site of the proposed location indicating all structures and street features on the appropriate street corner for review by the city.
- (ii) A complete petition of at least two hundred fifty (250) city resident signatures in favor of the proposed naming, of which at least two-thirds (2/3 (one hundred sixty-six ((166)) shall be residents of the neighborhood of the proposed sign location."

This is to ensure that neighborhood residents are supportive of the proposal and that the proposed location is acceptable to the Transportation, Traffic, and Parking Department. Staff suggest the commission provide a favorable recommendation subject to the standards above.

ADOPTED: May 21, 2025
Ernest Pagan
Chair

ATTEST: _____
Laura E Brown
Executive Director, City Plan Department