

To the Planning Board and Local Community,

I am a 33-year-old resident of Ipswich - my family having been here for several generations. It is a unique town with an intriguing history. However, Ipswich seems to be in an interesting time of rapid development that is at odds with the town's character. I am writing today specifically to address the proposed plan for Waldingfield Farm by Ora, Inc.

Waldingfield road holds a great deal of history dating back nearly 400 years. As an original portion of Appleton Farms, this land became Samuel Appleton's in a 1638 land grant by King Charles I. In 1885 this land was home to Major James Waldingfield Appleton's Waldingfield Beagles, the first and oldest pack of beagle hounds in the United States, still in existence today in Virginia. It was his father, Daniel Fuller Appleton, who went to great lengths to reacquire the land of Samuel Appleton's original grant, after it had been split up into separate farms. An effort spanning years. It was James' brother, Randolph "Budd" Morgan Appleton who built the original Waldingfield in 1889 and Budd's daughter, Julia Appleton Bird who built the Waldingfield we know today. All to have corporate offices and an underground car park end up on the land of their family's homestead.

I have reviewed Ora Inc.'s plan. I have spoken with Jennifer Williams, a senior project manager for the company, and I attended the 11.10 Planning Board Meeting. Question: Why did Ora, Inc. choose this property? Their plan does not restore the inherent integrity that is the fabric of this historic site. Waldingfield has a soul and is more than a large parcel of land that could meet the unfortunate fate of locations whose owners did not value the character and story these properties told. Stuart Abelson's plan is elaborate, phased and comprehensive as it addresses the need for a corporate campus. May we ask how this plan, with some "check the box" references to the restoration and repurposing of existing buildings, serves to address the needs for a sustainable, historically relevant project? **Waldingfield deserves better.**

Building Phases

Phases 1A and 1B of Ora's development are not offensive, however, I do think they have missed the mark. The proposed guest house and gothic barn are institutional at 21,000 sq ft, in addition to the current stable of 10,387 sq ft. What is essentially a dormitory, where the Samuel Appleton Homestead once stood, is not appropriate on historic Waldingfield Road. These buildings may simulate the original, but they lack authenticity. Phases 2 and 3 show a grim future for the farm. Phase 2 – a team and skill building office space with underground car park - is so large at 50,000 sq ft that it is phased itself, resulting in years-long, ongoing construction and disruption to that area. This will only continue with Phase 3 at 16,000 sq ft for a health and mindfulness center. These proposed structures are massive and detract from the character of Waldingfield. And what is the long-term environmental impact of such structures so close to the Ipswich River, one of the most endangered rivers in the Country?

As mentioned, Ora, Inc. values sustainability. These proposed buildings, however, contradict that value. **Projects like these are disguised as responsible adaptive reuse, but are in fact corporate developments that severely limit the sustainability of these Great Estate properties. They become pigeonholed for use as private schools, nursing homes, condominiums, and yes...corporate headquarters and offices. The needs of a corporation are evolutionary and focused on growth. Therefore, if face-to-face daily office work is required again, how many employees will then be on site? When the pea stone drive, they've said will remain, becomes too costly to maintain with on-campus traffic, will they pave? What could future Planning Boards approve once Waldingfield is already a corporate campus?** What is more development once the damage has already been done? A private, single-family owned farm is no longer an option. What happens to the traffic on Waldingfield Road? On Highland, Goodhue, and County? What happens to those enormous structures that have been built below and above grade, if they sit empty? **These may not be concerns now, but they likely will be in the future.**

Open Space

Ora, Inc.'s open space percentage is good, but not exceptional. This is one of *the* most historic properties and roads in Ipswich. During the 11.10 Planning Board meeting, there was much discussion around the starting point for that percentage. The place to begin must be

protecting the two prominent paddocks, a view shared with Wayne Castonguay of the Open Space Committee. The paddocks must be reserved for agricultural use with the possibility of limited building to support that agriculture. View easements should be iron-clad. If Ora currently believes that this development is their “maximum dream campus”, then why not take this measure? At what point does the construction stop? The current proposal for a 9,200 sq ft daycare center at New England BioLabs, in addition to the new wing being built, is a good example. We can’t trust that Ora’s needs won’t change. I find Ora’s initial attempts to conceal the scope of Phases 2 and 3 alarming. When they no longer have a need for horses in those unprotected paddocks, will they build?

Housing Development

During our call, Jennifer Williams said that Ora wants to purchase the property regardless of this plan being approved and may consider other uses to recoup the financial losses of this approval process. One idea, to develop a few houses on the farm and turn the main house into a clubhouse, is good in theory, but bad for the neighborhood. While I appreciate the concern for financial loss, this is a risk one takes in business. At the 11.10 Planning Board meeting Ora’s architect, John Harden of Olsen Lewis Architects, showed two different housing development plans for Waldingfield. These were drawn as part of a square footage study, but were presented as a possibility of what *could* happen alternatively to Ora’s proposal, should a residential developer purchase Waldingfield. The term “fear tactic” was used by Planning Board member, Helen Weatherall. I agree, and this makes many of us, as citizens of this community, feel uncomfortable. Based on my call with Ms. Williams, it appears Ora, Inc. could very well be these hypothetical developers. There is no need for a development on Waldingfield Road. What is needed is for things to look and feel relatively the same, in perpetuity for the benefit of future generations.

Mr. Abelson says “I don’t want to be the guy who destroyed Waldingfield...”, and I do believe he is sincere. But he will be if this plan is approved. Many people in the community enjoy that road, whether it be walking their dogs, running, riding their horse, etc., and have done so all their lives. But the people proposing this project don’t share those experiences. They do not understand the enormous, negative impact of their proposed development. Certainly, most people can appreciate Waldingfield, but few can understand just how important that area is unless they have roots in our community. A corporate campus of this scale and design would

change the experience and feeling of that road forever. People often negate feelings, but it is those intangible moments of nostalgia that are experienced on that road because of the farm's sense of history and rural character. **Waldingfield deserves better.**

There are other viable, sustainable options that are kinder to and more respectful of such an enormously important part of Ipswich. There is a unique opportunity for our community at Waldingfield, and I sincerely hope that what is best for the property, the road, and the town is considered above all else. With collaboration, creative thinking and pooled resources, this location could be the leading-edge project for repurposing historical properties with sensitivity, taste and a financial acumen that could put Ipswich on the map for bringing historical restoration to a financially viable end. May I ask all of you on this Board to consider the lasting negative impact this development will have on our community when making this decision.

Respectfully,

Daniel Markos