

Ethan Parsons

From: Jack Whittier <jack.whittier@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 10, 2022 2:59 PM
To: Jack Whittier; Ethan Parsons
Subject: Ipswich Planning Board, Public Meeting, 55 Waldingfield
Attachments: PB_January 12 2022.pdf

All

Please find attached the agenda for the public meeting this Wednesday evening, January 12, Zoom only. A few thoughts below interspersed with "notes" from last week.

Mr. Ethan Parsons, please forward to the PB members, thank you.

This meeting is largely devoted to Ora Inc.s proposed commercial development of 55 Waldingfield. While the agenda does not specify topics it can reasonably be anticipated the following topics will be addressed although probably not in the order below.

- Open space. I think/hope this topic will (finally) be resolved
- Phases 2 and 3, notably Ora gave a brief overview of revised areas for each of the two phases at the last meeting. My guess is we will hear more about the revision. The revised area for Phase 2 is in the range of 25-30,000sf. I'm uncertain what buildings are included in the revised plan. You may recall the initial plan was 56,000 sf for Phase 2 (the office building) and 16,000 sf (the health and wellness center). We might also hear if there are possible future phases or if the commercial development is "done" with the completion of Phases 2 and 3.
- In addition to the revised building plan I believe Ora will address parking spaces. The original plan called for ~140 below grade parking spaces. In the revised plan my notes indicate ~80 at grade parking spaces. Personally I don't like the thought of gazing across the front paddocks from Waldingfield to see a parking lot, I don't see how a parking lot of 37 parking spaces in front of the Bird mansion (from Phase 1A) plus an additional 80 or so new parking spaces is compatible with the now designated historic character of the entire site or with Ipswich in general. We will see what / how Ora proposes to hide the cars/trucks/vans from view.
- On site population. Presently the estimate is 200 people for several days per week. Last week the Ora architect, Mr. Harden, indicated the population would be lower but I did not catch a revised population estimate.
- Traffic impacts. I'm not sure if the existing traffic impact study will be updated to reflect the possible changes associated with the revised building plans. This is a big issue and hopefully we will hear from Ora consultants regarding the ~600-1,200 average daily trips forecasted in the existing traffic impact study. For me the traffic impacts are significant and completely unsupportable on a designated scenic road. In my opinion, the increased threat to each of us, a pedestrian, cyclist, equestrian or driver are real and palpable.
- Regarding traffic impacts, recall the original study and the update did not include delivery trucks, maintenance vehicles, caterers or other service vehicles. Hopefully this oversight will be corrected.
- Sustainability. Ora made a brief presentation regarding sustainability last week. Perhaps we will hear more. Regenerative development was brought up and is laudatory, let's see where the details come in. Many of you know but I'm a solar guy for my career. Even as passionate as I am about solar I'd hate to see multiple arrays in the front paddocks! I'm curious where the PV will be located, especially if the existing trees are used to hide the parking lots. As we all are likely to know, shade and solar panels are not compatible. Maybe there is enough roof space for net zero or better, we'll see.

- Stormwater runoff. There are several hundred pages of work here by professional engineers that have not been addressed. My guess is this topic will come up.
- Environmental impacts. We have heard little to nothing on noise (recall traffic above), air, light, water, soil impacts nor on wildlife or vegetation impacts.
- Some sense of the timeline for completion of the PB process.

What I hope the agenda, or future agendas, to include

- Revisiting the Gross Floor Area topic. The PB was clearly frustrated by the GFA topic and took a non-binding 4-1 vote in favor of using a version of the definition of GFA. The Friends of Waldingfield attorney has noted the uncertainties and irregularities regarding the definition. My personal belief is the GFA issue is pivotal and should be definitive. The lack of a clear definition in the Great Estate Bylaw is troubling and places the PB in an awkward position. In my mind we need to work with the PB members who's exasperation was evident and understand why they are willing to move forward with an undefined term that is fundamental to the determination of a Great Estate. I've said this before but the PB members are volunteers whom we should applaud for their civic contribution. To the extent we understand their needs for information so that we can help them is to all of our collective benefit.
- Overall impact of the proposed commercial development. A well known tactic is to piecemeal impacts so that the incremental effect of an action seems insignificant while the cumulative or overall impact of many actions is considerable. Ora has followed this strategy and to be fair the planning process somewhat dictates consideration of individual items such as traffic, buildings, population, etc.. What we have yet to hear or address is the overall impact of the proposed project and especially on the character of Ipswich which values history and open space. Ipswich residents have long been stewards of our land and thoughtful about how to preserve what is valuable. Furthermore the character of Waldingfield Road, which is a designated scenic road with an almost unique blend of agrarian / rural / NE flavor, is widely cherished throughout our community. In my mind this is a huge issue that bears careful consideration by the PB.
- Addressing citizen input from letters that have been written to the PB but have not been publicly discussed. In particular letters from Nancy and Bob Baker regarding Title 5 considerations have not been addressed nor have calculations performed by Mr. Brian Townsend regarding GFA.
- Adequate time set aside for citizen input for debate and response. We have talented community members with expertise. The PB hearings are in response to Ora Inc.'s application for a special permit and it is understandable that Ora be required to present the development plans. However substantive issues have been brought up by both the FoW attorneys and community members that deserve consideration in the public arena. The limited ability to speak is one thing and certainly understandable. However my thinking is time should be factored in to allow for a considered response to Ora Inc. proposals. In my mind "time" means days to assess and respond to new information rather than on the spot sound bite moment during a Zoom call.
- A cost-benefit analysis. There is tacit recognition that the Ora commercial development will add to the tax base of Ipswich. The planning process appears to not address this topic but it is there. Adding to the tax base is one thing but meaningless without careful consideration of the expense side of the ledger. Some of the added expenses may be readily discernible, e.g., added wear and tear to Waldingfield Road leading to increased expenditures for the road budget, while others hard to quantify such as increased risk of injury or death associated with dramatically higher levels of traffic. There are many items that constitute a benefit / cost analysis and in my opinion an independent analysis is something the town of Ipswich would want to see to help in the decision making for approving a special permit.

I hope to "see" each of you at the Zoom call on Wednesday. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to be heard.

Regards
Jack