

Calm Traffic vs Calm People

I have listened carefully to many of the Planning Board Meetings that have focused on the proposed development of 55 Waldingfield Road by Ora, Inc. Ora seems like a thoughtful, forward-thinking company that is mindful of its footprint on a local and global level. Recent discussions have focused on the increased traffic density that would result from Ora's development plans. What is the impact of a higher volume of traffic one of the most iconic country roads in New England? I have lived on Argilla Road for over 60 years. This road, also designated a scenic road in the early 1970's, has, arguably, become one of the most traveled dead-end roads in the region. In the past the traffic density was concentrated in the summer season and characterized by fast moving congo-lines of cars loaded with people hoping to enjoy a day on Crane's Beach. That pattern continues, but today traffic has increased significantly over the other three seasons of the year. Because of the traffic, those who live on Argilla have to be very strategic about the timing of when to go for a walk, ride or run. In addition, these activities are often not done without reflective safety shells and strobe lights on a person's front and back. In my time, there have been herculean efforts to try to calm the traffic that goes to beach, but the reality is calm traffic is almost an oxymoron. Achieving this goal has remained elusive. Establishing calm traffic patterns requires deliberate action and relentless enforcement. More important, it requires individual accountability and responsibility on the part of drivers to respect the goal and recognize that driving 60 in a 30 does not help.

Waldingfield Road is not Argilla Road. It does not have one of the finest beaches you can find on the end of it. However, it is surrounded by the farmland at Appleton and the pastures, woods and fields of proposed development site. The winding, tree lined nature of the road has been essentially unchanged for hundreds of years. As before, a walk or ride there today brings with it a piece of mind and a sense of calm that is hard to find in the fast pace uncertainty of our present world. Ora has made the argument that they will be able to mitigate the increased traffic density associated with employees driving to corporate headquarters by using strategies to calm the traffic. Signage, speed bumps, shuttle buses are some of the ideas on the table. However, little was offered on the subject of enforcement. It is also hard to imagine that the sense responsibility of Ora's drivers would somehow be different than all the others.

There remains an opportunity to preserve Waldingfield Road as it is, a slice of paradise that helps to calm people and give them sense of hope that our natural world is ok. At the end of the day what is a more important outcome of a planning board process: calm people or calm traffic?

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