

February 11, 2022

Via email to Mr. Ethan Parsons

Ms. Carolyn Britt, Chair
Planning Board
Town of Ipswich
25 Green St.
Ipswich, MA 01938

Re: 55 Waldingfield Road, Prepared Remarks for February 10 meeting, updated February 11, 2022

Dear Chair Britt and Members of the Planning Board

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Jack Whittier and I live at 35 Waldingfield Road.

My life is directly impacted by what goes on on Waldingfield. We hear the word NIMBY used as a pejorative to dismiss our concerns. I embrace the notion that I and my neighbors need to be noisy about what goes on in our back yard, our front yard and all around our immediate community. If we don't speak up, then who will? This is where we live.

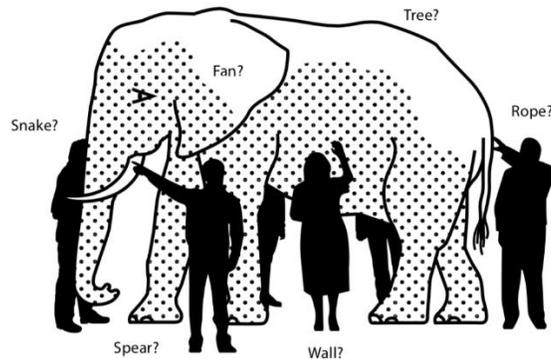
I offer one overarching thought followed by specific topics for your consideration. The recent letter from the Ora attorney is sprinkled with changes, again. Some of the changes are indicative of Ora being responsive to Board and/or community input, good for the firm. Some changes feel like reflexive gestures to curry favor with the Board members. While presenting their best foot forward, let's continue to keep a critical eye on the details as they matter. I have attended every Planning Board meeting related to the proposed corporate office complex as well as other Town board meetings on the same topic. As deeply immersed as I am in the substance of the proposed development, I would be hard pressed to say what Ora's plans are at this point and I think the same would be true for each of you. My request to you is to continue to ask the hard questions and press for clarity on the plans.

Traffic Impacts are Impractical to Mitigate

We have many letters from our community addressing traffic impacts that I encourage the Planning Board to take to heart. We also have expert legal and planning input that is thoughtful, considered, and timely. The traffic impact mitigation suggestions from Ora are difficult to manage, strain our credulity in terms of whether Ora employees will wait around a parking lot for a van, and downright impractical and unenforceable.

My addition to the voices of others is the observation that the traffic impact analysis continues to miss the mark. We have been presented with an engineering modeling effort that is focused on traffic flow not on people or on a scenic road. These are significant and meaningful omissions that need to be addressed. I've worked in the engineering field for my career and understand the use of tools and quantification of the world according to equations found in reference books. It's a great profession and engineers enhance the lives of all of us. However engineering tools have limitations and we are witnessing one big limitation here, the application of a tool designed to address traffic impacts but not

impacts to cyclists, equestrians, pedestrians or others who use the road. We are missing a fuller picture of traffic impacts. To me it is like the parable of the blind people and the elephant where we each have our subjective truths yet fail to see the bigger picture.



The lack of emphasis on non-vehicular safety is astonishing to me. The only safety-related concerns in the TIA modeling are about vehicles bumping into each other, whether at the entrance to 55 Waldingfield (a blind corner) or on either ends of the road. Outside of the modeling we have seen presentations on speed tables and traffic calming both ideas now seemingly dismissed by Ora. The TIA offers no assessment of the potential vehicle to human impacts. How many people will be injured or killed by a significant increase in daily traffic flow? We need to ask this question and then make an informed decision.

Last night the Ora traffic engineer noted that up to three additional cars per minute at peak hours are projected. Waldingfield Road is about 1 mile long and it takes the average walker about 15-20 minutes to cover a mile. For a roundtrip on Waldingfield this translates to an additional 90-120 cars per walk at peak hours! That is how we quantify the impact. What we have not yet seen is the quantification of the impact on human life and we need to.

My recommendation is for the Planning Board to authorize an assessment of non-vehicular impacts on Waldingfield Road associated with the significant increase in average daily traffic flow.

Visual Impacts Impair the Character of Waldingfield

In repeated presentations and documents Ora has asserted that the buildings and parking lots would not be visible from Waldingfield Road, often backed up with summertime photos when trees are in full foliage. (BTW, I appreciate the firm's representatives backed away from a blanket statement last night regarding sightlines but I have written notes to confirm what I have already stated in public.) This is a patently false assertion. I took the picture below on February 10. As you can readily see, the Bird Mansion literally pops out of the landscape across the paddock. Adding 25-30,000 sf new construction adjacent to the existing building will create a much larger visual impact. With the inclusion of greater

than 100 parking spaces in front of the buildings, filled with cars, trucks, delivery vans, and other service vehicles, the visual impact will be overwhelming. And that says nothing about required nighttime security lighting on what is now a quiet, unlit area. And while I have not included a picture of the 34 parking spaces that are proposed immediate to Waldingfield Road at the existing barn, these parking spaces are perhaps as great a concern due to both proximity to the road and the consideration that they are included in Phase 1B. I have repeatedly requested Ora to re-design the parking lots to hide them from public view and there has been zero movement on that request.

To me the character of an area begins with the sensory impressions afforded by sight. Parking lots filled with vehicles, corporate structures imposing over the landscape, and a traffic filled street are hardly in keeping with the existing character or the character we hope to preserve. Personally I cannot fathom a corporate complex dominating the 39 acres of the Bird Estate and surrounding area. The irony of course is we have spent a lot of time discussing Open Space to what end? Does Open Space enable us to simply look across the lovely paddocks at a looming corporate building with a parking lot of nearly 100 cars and trucks?

My recommendation to the Planning Board is to request preparation of visual impact design drawings to better understand the full ramification of the office complex. The design drawings can be presented in a variety of formats. For example, Google Earth allows for the opportunity to show seasonal changes from a street view perspective which is an especially useful feature.

Scenarios

I have worked in the engineering field for my entire career and have considerable appreciation for simulation models, both their strengths and limitations. My experience is a modeling effort includes scenarios and sensitivity analyses to provide the decision-maker, in this case the Planning Board, with a full picture of what may be possible. Further, the planning effort tries to focus on worst case scenarios to help mitigate future risks.

In this case we are offered by Ora Inc. a single scenario predicated on data provided by the applicant. Last night Ora argued that the scenario is worst case. This is far from true and misses the strength of planning.

We do not have high, medium, low scenarios nor do we have an independent assessment of possible employee populations, not only Ora population but future occupants, that are tied to floor space or other metrics. To me this is important as my sense is the Planning Board and the community are not afforded the opportunity to fully appreciate the magnitude of traffic impacts. And even without a fuller picture, the Town consultant has noted the conservative predicted increase in traffic flow is "significant." To me that is already especially concerning.

I encourage the Planning Board to formally request to Ora to prepare scenarios that are agreed to with the Planning Board and community to fully understand the scope of potential impacts.

Phases beyond 2 and 3

We have been told, repeatedly, Ora is a successful, growing firm within a growing market sector, good for them. With growth will come additional pressure to acquire space for employees. As bad as the impacts are with the current plans, future on-site growth, whether through increased office density or additional building construction, will likely exacerbate the already negative impacts.

Interestingly and perhaps telling, Ora does not commit to foregoing future expansion. Indeed, the firm’s legal counsel told the planning board at a recent meeting “we don’t want to get trapped” on that topic. This is not good planning. As Chair Britt observed in late August last year, “to some extent, that’s what happened with Biolabs, I’d like to just like to know it up front.” Also, and at the same meeting. Ora, attorney Chip Nylan called it an “appropriate question.” It is difficult to understand why Ora felt it an appropriate point in August 2021 yet doesn’t want to discuss future expansion now. Chair Britt, I encourage you to request from Ora to submit their expansion plans beyond Phases 2 and 3.

The more we learn the less desirable the corporate complex appears. We have a viable alternative with the proposal from private citizens that offers a path forward that avoids these consequential damages to the health and safety of our community as well as the character of Ipswich. I will continue to work with you to further suss out the details that are so impactful to our life here on the North Shore.

I appreciate your time and attention

Jack Whittier
35 Waldingfield Road



Bird Mansion, 55 Waldingfield Road, Photo taken at Paddock Gate by Jack Whittier, February 10, 2022