

Letter to the Editor 2/11/22

I'm writing about the Ora proposal to locate a small company headquarters under the town's Great Estate provisions on Waldingfield Road that the Planning Board and growing numbers of neighbors and taxpayers are embroiled. I'm one of them, having lived immediately across the Ipswich River from the Bird estate in question since my parents moved to Ipswich in 1948. I returned for real and built a house here in 1980.

I met the senior Bird's and one granddaughter worked with me in international journalism for several years. I have canoed and fished the river, biked the trails and ridden horses around the place and along the road countless times.

When I first heard about the Ora proposal after being approached by a company employee and one already convinced neighbor before a town meeting last June, I felt what I thought to be a small company retreat might be OK. It was a very hot day. I may well have raised my hand to vote for it.

i hadn't studied it and didn't know much about it at the time. I do now.

I'm quite opposed as I've learned more and more and attended two Planning Board meetings in person and five zoom ones, the latest last week. Here's why:

1. The plan has grown and almost metastasized since first described. I'm very troubled by the constant changes and "refreshing" of the Ora master plans that are presented just before meetings. Yes, it's fine that they're altering things based on public reactions, but it's not so fine that by doing so the meetings are dominated with their "new and revised" with moving targets for those opposed AND that the company misread the issues so poorly at the outset on key matters like the green belt, front pastures, traffic and parking lots, etc. that they have to keep altering it now.

2. Kudos to the Planning Board members on trying to absorb the changing proposals and many thoughtful taxpayer letters about it (160 now and growing on the town website). They may be tired of it by now, but it's troubling that most of the questions asked of Ora now comes from the public not the Planning Board members. And I haven't heard the company owner/founder speak on behalf of the Ora plans at all.

3. Most important is the large and unsolved traffic and safety concerns. It's seems simple that no matter how you slice it, Waldingfield Road cannot comfortably handle the added traffic that a small corporate headquarters would attract. Speed bumps, shuttle buses or the like, might help a very little bit, but will not solve the road being used much more daily by folks hurrying to get to the office. The traffic numbers keep changing. The road is dangerous enough as is. We all have our stories. I have been involved in two small accidents on the road, once as a passenger on the way to school in icy conditions many years ago and the other when driving a horse trailer in a big rain storm when rear-ended by a car behind me. Happily, both were minor.

Yes, I am walking the Waldingfield walk with a vested interest as a cross river abutter. But I think of myself as having much more than a NIMBY (not in my back yard) perspective. I'm told Ora is a good company with good corporate conscience. It may be a good fit for Ipswich. But I feel that the owner should appreciate from the very thoughtful and growing resistance that it's not a good fit at all on a small, rustic, historic, picturesque and already unsafe road.

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