

5 Bailey Street
Ipswich, MA 01938
April 29, 2022

To Members of The Ipswich Planning Board:

There have recently been assertions made that Hamilton residents have jurisdiction over the property at 55 Waldingfield Road. This is either misguided or disingenuous, as jurisdiction over this parcel sits squarely in the hands of the Town of Ipswich and all boards and departments involved in servicing this property. Hamilton residents lack standing since they do not reside in or pay property taxes in Ipswich.

The question before the Ipswich Planning Board is whether Ora's proposed adaptive reuse of an Ipswich residential estate honors the fundamental integrity of the property including preservation of the main house, other buildings and grounds while also taking into account the realities of the 21st century and interests of the town. There are many examples of adaptive reuse in Ipswich, both from commercial use to residential, and vice-versa. The well-known examples are Turner Hill, New England Biolabs and The Sisters of Notre Dame. Other less known examples are EBSCO (former mill buildings), Ipswich Ale (former clam processing plant) in addition to small stores (South Side and East Street) and former public schools that are now residences. These examples demonstrate the forward-looking, realistic thinking of Ipswich residents and town officials.

Tangential claims made by Hamilton members of the Save Waldingfield group either lack merit or are undeterminable: an in-depth tax study to identify property tax revenues from residential versus commercial use is not necessary. It is generally known that property tax valuations are higher for commercial use because assessment takes into account income, which is not the case for residential use. In addition, it is unlikely one could ascertain with precision whether members of Myopia are crowdfunding to purchase the property, which the Save Waldingfield group denies. However, since Myopia membership is exclusive and anonymous, and Save Waldingfield participants are anonymous but can afford a state-of-the-art website and can retain a Boston law firm, the coincidence does more than raise a red flag.

Please be sure that meeting participants who wish to comment during hearings identify their name and address, and do not be distracted by our neighboring town. Most importantly, make your decision based on the best interest of Ipswich now and in the future.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Benfield
Former Chair, Ipswich Planning Board