

April 28, 2022

To the Ipswich Planning Board:

This is a letter I submitted to the Ipswich Local News, which was published on Wednesday, April 28. However, I would also like to submit it formally to the Ipswich Planning Board as well, as I understand that you are receiving so many letters opposing the ORA project, which I do not think reflects overall town sentiment.

Thank you,

Charlotte Kahn
30 Spring Street, Ipswich

Friends of Waldingfield ad contained falsehoods

It's one thing to have a robust public debate based on the facts of a case. It's another to try to sway public opinion by distorting the facts, as occurred in last week's full-page ad in the Ipswich Local News opposing ORA's proposal for 55 Waldingfield Road.

For the record, I formed my opinion about ORA's proposal from listening to Planning Board meetings and doing research. I have no connection to anyone involved and am writing only because I am so appalled by the opponents' tactics.

Last week's ad claimed that ORA is proposing "125,000 square feet of commercial office space, 500+ daily vehicle trips, " and" 120 new parking spaces with commercial lighting," creating" increased "pedestrian safety concerns." All false.

The actual project before the Planning Board -- if fully built out -- would add no more than 47,000 square feet of built space to buildings currently on site. This is not a corporate headquarters but a "collaboration and wellness center" to which ORA's workers would come occasionally.

Externally unchanged, the mansion would contain meeting space and ten bedrooms. A 20-bedroom, guest house would replace the caretaker's cottage and be designed to reference the Appleton family homestead and barn at that location. A 5,000 square foot addition to the current barn would make it more equestrian friendly. ORA would add an elevator to the current carriage house and might, in the future, build an L-shaped addition for meetings and exercise around a second courtyard --about 30,000 square feet total -- compatible with the current architecture.

Plans for parking keep the ten spaces in front of the mansion, add 30 spaces out of view from the road and keep the existing parking area near the barn for a total of 50 spaces -- all with a pea stone surface and dark-sky lighting.

The proposal includes a mile-long pedestrian path open to the public linking to a historic garden. ORA has pledged to preserve 62% of the property as protected open space and to offer first right of refusal to a non-profit if they were to sell.

Finally, no one is proposing to change Waldingfield Road's status as a "Town designated Scenic Road," so it doesn't need to be "saved." In fact, in response to concerns about traffic, ORA arranged with EBSCO to use 30 downtown parking spaces and will offer a shuttle from the station to the site. They also proposed reducing Waldingfield Road's speed limit from 25 to 20 miles an hour.

Personally, I think it sounds like a good deal for the town.

Charlotte Kahn

Spring Street