

IPSWICH PLANNING BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

Remote Meeting using ZOOM

Thursday, February 10, 2022

7:00 PM

Pursuant to a meeting notice posted by the Town Clerk and delivered to all Board members, a remote meeting of the Ipswich Planning Board was held on Thursday, February 10, 2022, using ZOOM. Board members Carolyn Britt, Jeffrey Anderson, Mitchell Lowe, Toni Mooradd, Helen Weatherall and Associate Member Laurie Paskavitz were present. Staff, Ethan Parsons, and recording secretary, Odile Breton, were also present.

Britt convened the meeting at 7:01 PM with a quorum present.

Britt requested an acknowledgement of attendance for all members present. Britt reviewed meeting procedures.

Citizen Queries: None noted.

Continued Public Hearing: Ora, Inc. for Site Plan Review and a Special Permit to use 55 Waldingfield Road as a “Great Estate” for business purposes pursuant to Section IX.H of the Zoning Bylaw. The proposal involves the alteration of more than 2,500 sq. ft. of commercial space as described in Section X.B.1 and the increase of required parking spaces by more than 10 as described in Section X.B.3 of the Zoning Bylaw, as well as associated site work, at 55 Waldingfield Rd. (Assessor’s Map 62, Lot 14), located in the Rural Residence A Zoning District, pursuant but not limited to the sections of the Zoning Bylaw cited herein as well as XI.J

Attorney Chip Nysten, Jennifer Williams, Project Manager for Ora, Inc, Charlie Wear, engineer with Hancock Associates, Heather Monticup, traffic engineer with Greenman Pedersen Inc., and architect, John Harden with Olson Lewis Architects, were present for the applicant.

Britt started the hearing with public comment for audience members that did not have an opportunity to speak at the last meeting for the Ora, Inc. public hearing.

Public Comment:

Joni Soffron, 18 Caroline Ave, said a Planning Board member, Helen Weatherall, contacted her about the Ora, Inc. application and told her not to support the application. Soffron said this was inappropriate for a Board member.

Parsons noted Board members are appointed by the Town Manager and Ms. Soffron can speak with the Town Manager about the issue.

Daniel Markos, 252 High Street, thanked the Board for being thorough on this application. He said the location is inappropriate for a corporate campus and feels that the development will be damaging to the historic character of Waldingfield Road.

Deborah Logan, 197 County Road, is concerned with traffic issues between motorized vehicles and non-motorized activities (pedestrians, equestrians). She said adding 500 trips/day is incredibly dangerous and would eliminate recreational use.

Will Friend, 951 Highland Street, Hamilton is a longtime resident of the area. He is concerned that Ora’s planned use remains in perpetuity. Working from home first may be true today while in a pandemic. Ora cannot predict future use. Friend noted current traffic issues on Waldingfield Road. He said it is the wrong location for a corporate campus.

Jack Whittier, 35 Waldingfield Road, said his life is directly impacted by the project. He is concerned about the recent changes made by Ora, Inc. He requested the Board press for clarification on issues. Traffic is a concern, and the impact is significant. A corporate campus is not in character with the neighborhood. He requested Ora plan and present for the worst-case scenario.

Amanda Markos, 8 Northgate Road, is concerned with construction traffic and alterations to a scenic road. She is concerned that Ora is unwilling to preserve both paddocks with a conservation restriction (CR). She said Waldingfield Road cannot handle the traffic, construction traffic directly impacts the neighborhood. Going forward with the project would cause irreversible damage to the neighborhood. The location is not appropriate for a corporate campus.

John Lichten, 7 Waldingfield Road, said he has not seen an analysis on the economic benefit to the Town from this project. Traffic and maintenance of the road are concerns. He has not had time to review changes submitted yesterday by Ora, Inc.

Britt moved the discussion to changes to Ora’s open space proposal and noted there will be additional time later in the hearing for more public comments.

Nylen reviewed the revised open space proposal by Ora, Inc., which was submitted earlier in the week. Nylen noted the original property had 68.87 acres of land. A portion was donated and created the Julia Bird Reserve. The remaining 39.9 acres includes 8.8 acres in a CR held by Greenbelt. The Great Estate Preservation Development (GEPD) bylaw requires 40% of the land be open space. Ora, Inc. has removed the CR for 8.8 acres from the open space proposal. The following is the revised open space proposal:

Area B	5.2 acres	13%	Loop around property
Area C	5.0 acres	12%	Land by entrance, stable & along Waldingfield
Area D	2.8 acres	7%	Paddock/pasture along Waldingfield
Area E	3.0 acres	8%	Formal gardens
Total Open Space	16 acres	40%	
Add Area A	8.8 acres		Land along Ipswich River in private CR
TOTAL	24.8 acres	62%	

Harden explained the relocation of parking near the mansion. There is a request to reduce the required parking for the site to make the proposed open space changes. Harden presented the site plan with the noted areas and reviewed the proposed loop trail.

Anderson appreciates changes capture the formal gardens. Anderson asked about the existing trail in the private CR with Greenbelt. Nysten said Greenbelt would prefer to discuss after Ora completes the application process with the Board.

Lowe asked about the parking for various phases. Harden reviewed parking for Phases 1A and 1B. He noted a request for a 25% reduction in required parking spaces. Phase 1A will have 20 parking spaces and Phase 1B will have 34 parking spaces for the guest house and barn.

Britt asked why Ora chose to protect the formal gardens and not the eastern paddock. Nysten said the formal gardens are considered more important to preserve. Harden added that by relocating and reducing parking Area E became available to preserve.

Public Comment:

John Beveridge asked how all the views from Waldingfield Road are preserved. He likes the loop trail and asked who will maintain it.

Nancy Baker, Goodhue Street, Hamilton asked if the trail through the wetlands needs a crossing.

Jack Whittier, 35 Waldingfield Road, said he doesn't understand how the new buildings by the mansion will not be seen from Waldingfield Road. He said the project preserves open space for parking.

Elizabeth Massey, 920 Highland Street, Hamilton requested clarification on east paddock and is concerned about site lines from Waldingfield Road. She asked if there will be public access to the formal garden.

Andy Brengle, Co-chair of Open Space Committee (OSC), said the OSC would like to review the revised open space proposal. The next OSC meeting is February 28, 2022. OSC has questions regarding the CR it will send to the Board.

Tad Heuer, Foley Hoag LLP, representing the Friends of Waldingfield, has concerns about the changes. A CR is not needed for the formal garden since it is a historical garden and is required to be preserved under the Great Estate Preservation bylaw.

Crocker Snow, 120 Topsfield Road, is opposed to the project for similar reasons already stated. He is frustrated with the late submission of changes. He does not see a resolution to the traffic issues.

Harden responded to several comments and questions. He explained how the vistas from Waldingfield Road will be preserved. Nysten addressed the question on the eastern paddock and said Ora intends to use the paddock for horses. He added this process allows for phases of development and Ora will have to come before the Board for future development.

Britt moved the discussion to traffic and safety. Nysten reviewed traffic principles and said Ora is committed to managing traffic flow associated with the site and retaining the character of Waldingfield Road and neighborhood. Ora will manage employees on-site with a reservation system. Traffic flows will be tied to the construction sequencing. Parking is reduced from 120 parking spaces to 90. There will be 30 off-site parking spaces and a shuttle service for employees and guests. There are no proposed structural changes or widening of Waldingfield Road.

Monticup summarized findings of the traffic report. She said safe access to the site will be provided. Ora will work with Ipswich and Hamilton to reduce speed to 20 miles/hour for Waldingfield Road. Monticup reached out to DPW in Ipswich and Hamilton to discuss traffic calming measures. Ora is committed to reducing trips to the site by providing a shuttle service. Monticup explained using peak hours for the traffic study.

Paskavitz suggested conditioning a traffic study after Phase 1A and Phase 1B are completed. Anderson was curious about traffic specifically for Phases 1A and 1B. He suggested providing data collected from neighbors to Ipswich and Hamilton DPW. Lowe asked how adjustments will be made if traffic problems arise after development. He is also interested in understanding traffic during lunch hours. Britt asked about including employees, asking if the count is it just Ora employees or if the counts include service provider employees. Weatherall inquired about the number of trips a shuttle service will make in a day.

Nysten said Ora will monitor traffic to the site and noted Waldingfield Road can handle the traffic for all phases of development in the worst-case scenario. Parking and traffic include all personnel working on the site, including deliveries. There will be an on-site kitchen. Williams discussed the reservation system and shuttle service. She noted there are no designated offices or cubes for employees. Employees must reserve work space prior to coming to the site. Monticup explained the traffic study uses peak am and pm hours as those times are worst case scenario.

Public Comment:

Chris Sandulli, 157 County Road, noted New England Biolabs (NEB) has a shuttle and suggested contacting NEB to see how the shuttle is working out.

Chris Florio, 44 Fellows Road, disclosed that Weatherall is his wife and comments made by him are not based on Weatherall's appointment to the Board. He said Ora, Inc. threatened the Town with a lawsuit for his comments on this application. He said most of his comments have been supportive of Ora but he feels the location is not appropriate for the project.

Nancy Baker, Goodhue Street, Hamilton is concerned about the traffic distribution throughout Ipswich and asked if a shuttle is practical. It adds to an employee's commute.

Charlotte Kahn finds Waldingfield Road dangerous. She noted the road has no shoulders. She likes traffic calming techniques that may reduce cut through traffic. She suggested making Waldingfield Road a one-way road on the weekends.

Marty Miserandino, Hamilton, noted Waldingfield Road is used by cyclists and is concerned about deadly accidents with added traffic.

John Beveridge, 965 Highland Street, Hamilton is concerned about traffic accidents. He said speed bumps slow traffic and do not reduce traffic. He said the shuttle service is a good idea but is concerned it will not be utilized as it adds to an employee's commute time.

Will Friend, 951 Highland Street, Hamilton is concerned about the approval for the use of the site. The Board needs to look at the worst-case scenario for use.

Tad Heuer, Foley Hoag LLP, concerned about the lack of a traffic plan. He is concerned with the limited time for public comments.

Jack Whittier, 35 Waldingfield Road, expressed concern about traffic modeling and safety. There needs to be a better understanding of future development on the site.

Anderson said the Board needs to find solutions to address issues such as parking and traffic. The Board needs to review engineering for Phases 2 and 3. Parsons noted the applicant needs to provide more information such as a stormwater management plan and a final site plan. Britt said the applicant needs to submit a final plan to wrap up the application.

Lowe moved to continue the public hearing to February 17, 2021, at a meeting beginning at 7:00 PM using ZOOM and Anderson seconded. The motion passed with 4 votes yes and 1 vote no (Weatherall).

Documents: Revised Open Space Plan received by Planning Office 2/9/22

Announcements/New Business

Parsons noted the Select Board is considering referring a building permit moratorium article to the Board. The Board would need to have a public hearing. Parsons said the article needs work and he is not sure where it will fit in the bylaw. There are questions for applications under current review by the Board. The article applies to multi-family developments of three or more units and subdivisions. Parsons noted that ninety-nine units have been approved by the Board since 2012 (Symes development on Mile Lane and Linebrook Road not included). Articles are due to the Town Manager by March 18, 2022, and the earliest public hearing that can be scheduled is March 10, 2022. Parsons is unclear on the Select Board concerns. He can not provide an outcome if the article passes. The article will be discussed at the Select Board meeting on Monday, February 14, 2022.

Adjournment

Lowe moved to adjourn and Weatherall seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 10:20 PM.

Meeting minutes prepared by: Odile Breton

Accepted on: March 10, 2022