

Ora Corporation and 55 Waldingfield Road

1st Ipswich Planning Board Meeting

August 25, 2021

Whittier Observations

Overall Impression / Opinion

Ora Corporation representatives presented an orchestrated and limited overview of the commercial development project. The presentation focused on pleasant architectural items and other pleasing items such as trails, setbacks, and well-drawn architectural renderings. Mr. Nolan presented an unfortunate position by stating at the outset the Corporation is electing to not discuss Phases 2 and 3, which represent 72,000 ft² of new commercial space. My opinion is this overt act to not address true and significant impacts to the character of Waldingfield Road is wrong and I intend to be noisy about it. Ora Corporation personnel know Phases 2 and 3 are significantly impactful and thus don't want to talk about it.

Ora Corporation presented to us what they could control. For example, the illustrations/drawings of the site excluded the parking spaces, up to 80 cars are being planned for between the main house and the barn/farmhouse area. In my view this omission is calculated to give a pastoral impression whereas the reality will be quite different. I have reviewed the Ora Corporation architectural renderings including the parking spaces but the architect chose not to present this information. Ora Corporation representatives talked a lot about being transparent and respectful for the neighborhood, the community and the environment. For me, the clear omission of parking spaces is a contrived way to present less than the whole picture and is not transparent, rather it is a corporate bit of persuasion that doesn't sit well with me.

Some Specific Observations

Regarding **Phases 2 and 3**, which I believe is the single most important impact issue to Waldingfield Road. For me, this scale of development is tone deaf and absurd for Waldingfield Road. The Ora Corporation attorney alluded to the cost and ambiguities for addressing future development plans as being the rationale for not putting forward development impacts for the Phases 2 and 3. My opinion is that is precisely the nature of planning, preparation and risk management for what is plausible. And to the point, Ora Corporation has done the math and presented how many ft² are possible and made that information public. So there is clear intent for development, the time frame is uncertain. And furthermore to the point regarding intent, the architect spent some time describing where future development might take place, which is roughly near the existing "pool house." The architect suggested this location is shielded from Waldingfield Road viewshed, I'm pretty sure I don't agree as the slope there and the height, I understand around 50-60 feet, would be readily visible.

Regarding **sustainability**, the presentation was notably silent and I believe this was a chance to show off corporate responsibility, a missed opportunity for Ora Corporation. In my mind, sustainability is an encompassing term that captures much of the impact thinking for Waldingfield Road, the community and the environment. If Ora Corporation is to be a responsible steward of the Great Estate, then focus on sustainability is equivalent to preservation and enhancement of the architectural features.

There was no mention of **traffic mitigation plans** for employees such as ride share or off site parking. Similarly there was no mention of the carbon footprint and how to get to net zero. The planning phase is the ideal time to plan for energy efficiency, solar energy, water planning, and transportation carbon reduction. I would imagine the Ipswich Light Department will be interested in the connected load, for all phases. Is a new substation required to serve the site, especially for Phases 2 and 3? If so, where will that be located? Are new distribution lines required to serve the load as it seems unlikely the current conductors, sized for residential loads, will be insufficient to meet commercial demand? Presumably any new lines will be sited in the existing corridor? For that matter, there was no indication the Ora representatives have informed the Light Department of their plans.

Continuing on the **sustainability topic**, we were not informed of plans for water supply, an increasingly pressing issue for Ipswich. Nor was there discussion of water runoff, septic, noise, light (for instance, what is the nighttime lighting plan?), wildlife, and vegetation other than their intent to retain existing trees to the extent possible.

Regarding **sustainability / traffic impacts**, there is an upcoming meeting that is devoted to traffic impacts but Ora Corporation missed an opportunity to talk about carbon neutrality and doing their part for climate sustainability. There was no solar / battery storage system discussion, no ride-share or offsite parking, nor did the parking lots have provision for EV charging. In my mind these are easy talking points they could have put forward as responsible corporate citizens.

Regarding **walking trails**, the architect presented a public trail around the property that largely follows existing trails. It was clear Ora Corporation / the architect had not thought about public parking / access to the proposed circumferential walking path. The architect indicated they had thought about a path along Waldingfield but produced no plans. Waldingfield Road is already dangerous to walk and encouraging foot traffic without proper safety measures will exacerbate difficult conditions. Jennifer Williams noted Ora Corporation parking will not be open for public access.

The expansion to the **existing barn and farmhouse** is considerable. The architect presented an illustration of a gothic barn that is patterned after an existing barn in Ipswich. I was struck by the size of the barn and associated buildings. Also, and one item on "my agenda", is to have the plans redrawn to place the parking spaces outside of the viewshed from Waldingfield Road. Furthermore, there is a greenhouse in the illustration that was not discussed nor have I seen the area (ft²) included in the space calculations.

Ora Corporation talked of **3 public meetings** with the PB plus a presentation to Waldingfield Road neighbors. My impression is three meetings is the Ora Corporation agenda to limit discussion. It will be interesting to hear from the PB as to how many meetings will be sufficient to gather the requisite information for decision making.