



TWO VOICES

Outside the Box

Big-box home-furnishings retailer IKEA wants to open stores in two local municipalities, which has some residents cheering and others griping. By M. Robyn Jones

The Swedish retail giant IKEA hopes to build stores in Stoughton and Somerville and it has received a mixed reaction typical for big-box stores: Some people welcome the jobs and tax revenue these large businesses can bring; others worry about problems such as traffic and the loss of open space. IKEA is planning on breaking ground at its Stoughton site this fall, but the Somerville project has been stalled in litigation. **Terry Schneider**, president of Stoughton's Chamber of Commerce, and **Gina Foglia**, a member of the Somerville community group **Mystic View Task Force**, which has been critical of IKEA, explains why they love or hate the idea of IKEA coming to town.

SCHNEIDER IKEA has such a unique product that its marketing has to be well outside of just little

Stoughton. I think Stoughton, as a town, is not IKEA's target audience. Stoughton is a central location for its target audience.

FOGLIA IKEA draws an audience from a much larger area, and the vehicular miles that get added on to the trips per day to the stores are just exponentially greater than you have for the smaller box stores. And that adds to a lot of other issues, like air pollution. In looking at the square miles, Stoughton is four times the size of Somerville. The amount of open space that you have in acreage is equivalent to the entire size of Somerville. We're a quarter of the size with three times the population.

SCHNEIDER One of IKEA's selling points was that they had a lot fewer delivery trucks going out. Due to IKEA's retail model of cash-and-carry, there are fewer

truck trips; therefore, less truck traffic and less pollutant.

FOGLIA But I think in a sense you're fooling yourself. Whereas we [in Somerville] face the air pollution every day, and the noise and the traffic and the sounds and the smells, in Stoughton, because you have so much land around you, there's a different mind-set. Also, IKEA's products are made elsewhere, and their profits go elsewhere. Small businesses in a community, their profits, the jobs, the sense of place — it all seems to stay there.

SCHNEIDER We're looking for a destination store. I think we're hoping to look at the positive or

“The benefit of the big-box store,” says Schneider, “is that it forces the competition, the mom-and-pop store, to offer better service.”

beneficial effects more than the negative. If we're smart, and we're trying to be, we will be able to capitalize on the traffic that the store's bringing in by increasing the amount of visits to other stores.

FOGLIA My guess is people will come and spend their time in IKEA, and then they'll leave. IKEA often positions itself, like it's trying to do in Stoughton and Somerville, by a highway, so people can come in and go. Now, with Stoughton, there's a little difference there, too, because they travel on the highway [directly] to IKEA. In Somerville, they travel on the highway, and then they have to travel on the local roads, and that's going to be a major problem.

SCHNEIDER The biggest concern we had with IKEA is that [shoppers] do end up on the local roads. And we see that as a positive opportunity to attract traffic to other local businesses.

FOGLIA Is that the kind of development you want along those roads? That's something that you guys have to answer.

SCHNEIDER We had to answer it before IKEA came to town, because we needed to see if we could fit IKEA in the plans of present and future. It's very possible that when

you have a lot more open space like we do, we might not be as careful in the planning. I know that I will try to use what's there when IKEA goes in and try to help populate our commercial space that we have available, so we can bring in more tax-revenue dollars.

FOGLIA You've expressed hope and desire for certain things to happen. But there's nothing put in place to make those things happen. When you look at having a megastore like that come in and draw people from such great distances, and then you're looking to have other businesses establish themselves adjacent to this megastore, air pollution, quality of life, and

sense of place all change.

SCHNEIDER I am very concerned about things like air pollution. We may compromise ourselves on the use of cars, which create air pollution, but the benefit of mobility improves our quality of life. Speaking as a Chamber of Commerce person and a businessperson, I think it was a good compromise for us. The benefit of the big-box store is that it forces the competition, the mom-and-pop store, to offer better service and to offer better reasons why [consumers] should be shopping at these stores in the center of town or on Main Street.

FOGLIA Why are you putting the pressure and the weight on that mom-and-pop store?

SCHNEIDER I'm not suggesting to put weight on them; I'm saying that's what the big-box store does do. I'm mainly against the big-box stores, and generically, the only reason I appreciate a big-box store is it forces a more competitive approach, and it makes people service our residents better. It doesn't have to be a big box. It could be any type of store. BG

This is an edited transcript.