EXHIBIT 15

Glen Arbor Sun
Here to Enlighten You
Covering Leelanau County Events, Characters, Businesses and the Arts
www.GlenArbor.com

Leland navigates a lighthouse and a rocky shoal

Investigative Article



Allegations of youth grooming, a Bear Man's tracks, and divisive debate over the role of religion in a small town

UPDATE, Feb. 18, 2026:

Not so fast.

The Leland Planning Commission delayed for at least a month its much-anticipated decision on whether to approve Apollos Properties' bid for a














special use permit to hold a Youth for Christ (YFC) ministry as a "club" in a storefront property in the heart of the business district overlooking Leland's Fishtown.

Commissioners voted 4-1 in favor of postponing their decision until March 11. They met Wednesday night in the Northport High School auditorium to accommodate a large and impassioned crowd.

Youth for Christ's presence in Leland, and its alleged recruitment of high school students and minors inside the public school, drew intense criticism from parents and community members this past fall.

Planning commissioner Lee Cory took issue with the findings of fact detailed in a memo [http://glenarborsun.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Memo-Apollos-SUP-App_022026.pdf] that Brad Wierda, a lawyer at Traverse City's Smith & Johnson Attorneys [https://www.smith-johnson.com/attorneys/bradley-d-wierda.html] , prepared for Leland Township. In that memo, Wierda highlighted Apollos' First Amendment concerns and found that a Youth for Christ ministry would fit Leland's zoning

Search the Sun

Categories

Archives

definition as a "club."

Cory, who was elected as the new chairperson following the resignation last month of Ross Satterwhite, said she found "so many holes" in the memo that she didn't feel she could make an informed decision.

"We have no analysis on what determines a club. The brief simply assumes it's a club," she said.

"We need a factual, unbiased opinion, based on the law as it applies to the facts in this case. This brief is incomplete."

Commissioner Sam Simpson seconded Cory's criticism of the legal guidance. Simpson, Skip Telgard, and newly appointed commissioner Brian Fenlon joined Cory in voting to delay a deciding vote until March.

The dissenting voice, commissioner Steve Scales opined that the Planning Commission had enough information, based on Wierda's legal brief, to hold a vote.

"We've had considerable correspondence from the applicant and from citizens," he said. "I think we're in a position to make a vote tonight."

Fourteen Leland citizens spoke during the public comment period prior to the Commission's vote to delay. All of them opposed a YFC "club" in the downtown business district or questioning whether YFC could call itself a members-only club when its own missionaries describe it more broadly as a "church."

Some community members opined that Wierda, who prepared the Township's legal brief, was biased and shouldn't have been given the assignment. The pointed to Wierda's resume as an alum of Calvin College, a private Christian school in Grand Rapids, and a former school board member at Traverse City Christian Schools—as evidence that he was too close to Youth for Christ.

Cory, Simpson, Telgard and Fenlon all called for a second legal opinion before they make their decision.

"It's too important for [Youth for Christ] and for Leland for us not to be especially deliberate," said Cory. "We've already spent time on this. But there's nothing wrong with us spending more time."

Many of those in the Northport auditorium applauded as Cory brought the February Planning Commission meeting to an end.

Three hours of public comment

During their Jan. 7 meeting, the Planning Commission heard nearly three hours of impassioned public comment. The meeting had been moved to the Northport Public School auditorium to accommodate a crowd that numbered in the hundreds. The commission's December meeting at the Leland Library was postponed due to a lack of space.

Approximately 60 percent of the 40 people who spoke during three different public comment periods opposed Apollos Properties' bid for a special use permit to hold a Youth for Christ ministry as a "club" in Jim VanSteenhouse's property, which sits in the business district overlooking Leland's Fishtown.

Concerned parents, grandparents and community members opposed the bid because they said only tax-paying retail businesses should be allowed within Leland's C-1 commercially zoned district. They found Youth for Christ's mission and previous pursuit and alleged recruitment of students (and minors) within the public school to be divisive. They recoiled at Youth for Christ missionary Micah Cramer

referring to them as "the enemy" during a church service in Northport in November —and VanSteenhouse's suggestion that Leland was an unsafe community. They encouraged Apollos to find another location for their ministry outside of downtown Leland, where the group also owns property.

The 40 percent who supported Youth for Christ's bid for a ministry said they wanted more religious opportunities for youth in the community. They alleged that opposition to the ministry and to the Cramers suggested a "discomfort with Christianity." They touted the First Amendment, and praised the Cramers for their "dedication" and "tough skin." A couple citizens alleged that people "care more about retail businesses than about our kids." Another grew emotional as she spoke about struggles in her childhood and the positive role of faith in her life.

The eventual result of the Planning Commission's decision could be appealed to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

A lawyer representing Youth for Christ, who owns property in Leland, has already alluded to the threat of lawsuits.