

District 1

Dear Leelanau County Commissioner:

Please find below a copy of the letter I have sent to our Leelanau Township Board, in hopes of effectively continuing the conversation related to the proposed Kitchen Road Cellular Communications Tower.

As your board, like the Township, welcomes new members, I think it is important that you are well informed about this ongoing proposal. I hope you will agree that the risks greatly outweigh the rewards on this project.

As you'll read below, the process to get to this point, with a pending special use permit has been fraught with a lack of appropriate process steps, a lack of transparency, questionable motives, a lack of accurate data, a lack of factual representation of the project itself, and more.

This proposed project needs to be stopped and put to rest once and for all.

Looking beyond this project, I hope that our county and township governments will make much-needed improvements to these processes for the future, and that if we do pursue similar projects in the future, that it is with the benefit of effective planning and process to ensure the best possible outcomes for our communities.

Thank you for your community service.

Rebecca Teahen

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12.30.24

Rebecca Teahen  
10891 E Garthe Rd  
Northport MI 49670

Dear Leelanau Township Board Member,

I have been sharing similar concerns with the Township Board and Planning Commission since the spring of 2024, but believe it's important to once again send in writing, as this "conversation" continues, regarding the proposed tower on Kitchen Road, especially as we enter 2025 with new members in elected positions.

**RECEIVED**

JAN 08 2025

LEELANAU COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATOR

The project and proposal have been “in the works” since a January 2022 resolution requesting that the County partner with the Township to improve cellular and internet coverage at that time. This resolution was entirely colored by the fact that we were still in the midst of the many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Great strides have been made since then. First and foremost, we are back to relatively “normal” activities of daily life with schools and public agencies now meeting in person, with the added benefit of remote options.

Our county is now entirely served by fiber-internet, and cellular technology has already improved dramatically and will continue to do so, including satellite service for emergency calls on new iPhones... this will continue to evolve and improve across platforms/providers.

However, since those wheels were set in motion back in 2022, it seems that the forces of inertia are keeping them in motion and we are now faced with a special use permit to build a 195' tall tower on top of a scenic ridge line, above a wetland, on the scenic and seasonal Kitchen Road.

Throughout 2023, I was told that cellular coverage would be improved through “improvements to an existing tower” in Leelanau Township. Later that year, or early in 2024, it became clear, as the Planning Commission has now affirmed, that in-fact this is in NO WAY an improvement to an existing tower. It is wrong to describe it that way and is not an acceptable presentation of the application for special use permit. The tower that stands on this site today is an almost invisible 40' tower. The proposal on the table is to excavate a 5000sf pad, build a 195' tower, build an access road, and fence in the area.

Again, perhaps it was the force of inertia that got us in this position to begin with. As far as I can tell, there was little to no appropriate public process to survey the landscape, determine appropriate siting and best use of public funds, solicit proposals for sites, etc.

Instead, when planners, experts, and public officials were asked how the site was selected, the best and only answer we received was...”we needed willing landowners,...and there was Brian.” To explain, the Brian referenced here is Brian Mitchell, the landowner of the proposed site, and a sitting member of the Planning Commission.

The County and Township have already committed funds to this project, before a special use permit has been approved. Rumor has it that the Road Commission was just days away from building an access road, again, before any permits had been secured. Apparently, they had a change of plans unrelated to the legality of this action.

Had they gone forward, and if this project goes forward, Mr. Mitchell would benefit personally from a new access road to the top of his property, through a wetland, at no expense to him, rather, funded by taxpayers. This is likely not a road he'd be able to get a permit for in any other way.

As noted above, both the county and Township have committed funds to this project, however, those funds committed to date are a small fraction of the total needed to complete the project. The project is likely to exceed \$500,000 in construction costs, hundreds of thousands more than are currently committed.

And for what?? We don't know the answer to that question, as there are ZERO firm commitments from carriers that they will locate on this tower. Further, the township will suffer if carriers do decide to locate there, as that will most likely mean that they move their equipment OFF the tower at the Fire Station... that means that the Township loses revenue from that tower, while Mr. Mitchell enjoys all that revenue in his pocket, thanks to this publicly funded project.

Ethically, it is concerning to observe the high-pressure sales work being done by some residents and neighbors to push this through with the claim of essential emergency services. There is little to no data to suggest that this is a real need, and in fact, even less data to suggest that this tower would meet that need!

*As a side note, it looks like the intent of the 2022 resolution was to quickly stand up a cell tower to meet the urgent needs of those working and learning from home during the pandemic. There is reference to "not waiting" for fiber-optic service. More than two years later, all of that is now irrelevant. Pandemic is over, fiber is in place...*

Again, we don't know if any carriers will use the tower, and even if they do, "cellular signals don't turn corners!" That means that while the propagation maps may show coverage in an area, it's still not going to serve any homes or trails that are behind a hill, or over the side of a bluff, or on the beach below a bluff. The claims that have been made on this front are false and misleading. I'm disappointed in the individuals pushing these narratives...for what gain I do not know.

All of the above is simply a collection of the many pieces of this project that cause me to shake my head, and hope that we can do better as a township and community. I believe that we can ...

We can do better in terms of public process, transparency, and accountability. We can do better in terms of protecting our scenic viewsheds and environmentally sensitive areas – thus being accountable to our own zoning ordinances and master plan!

*Of course, it is important to note that the proposal violates NUMEROUS zoning ordinances and is in dramatic conflict with our master plan...If approved, it would call into question the validity of these documents and our zoning process.*

And, we can do better in terms of providing improved cellular service through thoughtful planning and new technologies to meet the needs of our residents and guests without this poorly planned behemoth in the middle of the Township. I am certainly not opposed to improved cellular coverage, but I am not at all convinced that this is the best approach to achieving that goal. It seems that this was perceived as the fastest, easiest route with the goal of having it completed years ago. Since that did not happen, let's take a big step back and make a plan that will be a win for our whole community and reflective of the values documented in our master plan.

Other communities have achieved this effectively. Look at Mackinac Island, Glen Arbor, Peninsula Township, and others. All have balanced the need for increased connectivity without compromising the scenic character of their communities.

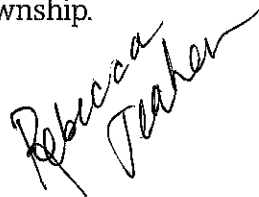
Even within our own township, other options have not been explored. A full study of best locations has not been conducted. A request for proposals from qualified landowners has not been done. The township hasn't even considered other properties already owned, which would retain revenue... many of these ideas have been discussed:

- On top of Braman Hill (yes, I agree, a giant tower would be ugly there too! But, could we make one that looks like a pine tree there and hide it a bit?). There is already an access road and power.
- What's happening with the leftover windmill tower? Can we add antennae there? Again, there is already an access road and power supply.
- Can we extend the existing fire hall tower? Would that improve anything?
- Can we add antennae on power poles, barns, lighthouses, etc using newer technology to "repeat" signal to more remote and hillside locations?

...and how can we get better information about which households are underserved currently and what a new tower would actually do for them, when we accept the fact that these signals do not turn corners or go through hills!?

We appreciate all your work to serve our community and realize it is very hard to "please everyone!" We are committed to working together to find a mutually beneficial solution to this issue.

Thank you for your dedication to Leelanau Township.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca Teaker". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page, overlapping the end of the typed text.

12\30\44

Dear LeLanau

I am writing about the proposed  
tower I do not think you are being  
truthfull about the tower and I do not want  
to wake up in the morning to a very  
disgusting ugly 200 foot tower

from  
Ben 3rd grade

12/30/24

Dear Lelehan, I am writing about the proposed tower on Kitchen Road, I feel that the current (and past) elected leaders are not following the rules of how to put it up. And no one wants to wake up to a very ugly tower! It will disrupt the wildlife both on the ground and in the trees. And remember there are solutions that can work for us all.

from: Grant Teahch Purdy  
grade 5 NORTHPORT

12.30.24

Elsie Purdy Teahen  
10891 E Garthe Rd  
Northport MI 49670

Dear Leelanau Township Planning Commission Member,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Elsie, and I am a ninth grader who lives in Leelanau Township. I am writing to express my concerns about the proposed cellphone tower on the hill.

First, I believe the planning process for this tower has not been fair or transparent. It seems that many people, including myself, were not properly informed about the project from the beginning. To me it seems that the process of finding a site and carrying out the research was not very thought through. As a young person who cares about my community, I feel that decisions like this should involve more input from everyone, and a more thorough "investigation."

I also think this tower is not a good way to attract young families to our area. Rather than making the hill a more appealing place to live, a cellphone tower might make it seem less inviting. Young families are looking for a peaceful, natural environment where they can enjoy the outdoors and spend quality time together, and a large cellphone tower could take away from that. I believe there are better ways to improve connectivity without putting something so large and disruptive in such a natural and pretty location.

Please consider these points before moving forward with the tower. It's important to think about how it will affect the people who live here, especially those of us who will grow up in this community.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

*Elsie Purdy Teahen*

Sincerely,  
Elsie Purdy Teahen  
9th Grade Student, Leelanau Township