

Contact:
Byrdie Butka
Pine Hollow Institute
231.632.5240
LFO@pinehollow.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
18 June 2015

Pine Hollow Institute Bids Farewell, with Regrets

The Elk Rapids charitable entity, Pine Hollow Institute, has closed due to excessively restrictive conditions imposed by their local Township Planning Commission, to opposition by some of its neighbors, and to delays caused by Township officials. PHI strove to provide a peaceful, beautiful place on the shore of Lake Michigan conducive to solving global problems through creativity, inspiration, and compassion. The property includes an architecturally significant house and barn built of native stone and wood set amid seven acres along 600 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline. Owner, Leslie Lee, donated the Pine Hollow property to the Institute in January 2014.

PHI met the standards for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status of the IRS active as of January 2014, and they applied for a special use permit as a Group Retreat with the Elk Rapids Township Planning Commission. During this start-up phase, PHI openly hosted meetings, retreats, fundraisers, and informational gatherings with the understanding that PHI was operating under a provisional status until the Planning Commission granted official standing as a Group Retreat. Many area nonprofit organizations benefitted from PHI over the course of the year. In good faith, PHI began working toward achieving requirements dealing with various issues and standards to meet ADA, fire, and building code changes set out by the Planning Commission in their June 2014 memo.

Although there was overwhelming support from the community as a whole, some neighbors were not in favor of PHI being granted a special use permit. On 18 May 2015, the Township Planning Commission surprised PHI with a memorandum that included restrictions far exceeding recommendations PHI had been given the year before. The most egregious of these new terms restricted retreats to 24 in a calendar year, and prohibited the use of PHI's existing health department approved commercial kitchen. These restrictions precluded the ability to operate a viable enterprise. During the 20th of May public hearing at which approximately 80 supporters and 10 detractors attended, the Planning Commission claimed to want to work with PHI. However, in an email written to PHI a few days later, on 4 June, the Planning Commission imposed still further restrictions on PHI such as prohibiting guests and employees from using a motorboat, among others. Despite the rigorous standards met for the IRS by PHI, the Elk Rapids Township Tax Assessor denied PHI's tax exemption.

In this unfavorable political environment, PHI withdrew its application for a Group Retreat special use permit on the 5th of June 2015 with the Elk Rapids Planning Commission, and is in the process of withdrawing its 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with the IRS. To their friends and supporters, PHI sends their deepest thanks, profound regrets, and farewells. Contacts: www.pinehollow.org and info@pinehollow.org.