

## Background - PID 29020538

Dennis and Susan Paulson

4755 County Road 16

Pequot Lakes, MN 56472

- When we purchased the property at 4755 County Road 16 in late 2019. It contained one pole building sized 20 x 30, which we wanted to use to store our boat and other recreational equipment items. The property is beautiful, with several acres of wooded trails and we enjoyed walking the area, particularly in the fall.
- In 2020, we realized we were out of storage space, so a land use permit (building permit) was applied for and granted for the building of a second pole building size 40 x 50. At that time, an SSTS was requested even though we had not made any mention of putting any residence on the site. (Later the city indicated they were not sure why we were told we needed an STSS as we have just over 5 acres and requirements for an SSTS are for under 5 acres.)
- After retiring from our office jobs late in 2021, we wanted to pursue a small-scale business within the Brainerd Lakes area as close as possible to our vacation lake home on the Cullen Chain of Lakes. In 2022 we decided to venture into a business that we are very enthusiastic about – firewood. This was the beginning of PT Embers Premium Campfire Wood, a sole proprietorship LLC.
  - The “business” took a few years to get going and is more of a hobby and is very small scale. We live in Maple Grove MN. We are in Pequot Lakes more in the Summer than Winter but, even in the Summer, we are up about 1/3 of the Summer, typically spending a few days at the lake and then going home for a few days, etc. throughout the Summer months.
    - When we are in Pequot, Dennis will spend some of his time cutting firewood at the property on County Road 16. He never does any processing prior to 9 a.m. or after 6 p.m. as he is respectful of his neighbors. Dennis knows his neighbors and they are aware of his firewood processing and have no issues with it.

- There are no employees as Dennis is the only one cutting firewood. There are no sales onsite as Dennis delivers the firewood in a trailer to customers.
  - The firewood is used for personal use, donations and selling to a small customer base.
- On 12/23/2024, Dennis turned in a request for a land use permit (building permit) to put a third pole building (40 x 48) on the property which would be used for storage as well as firewood processing. (Due to the fact that there is a lot of inclement weather in MN, Dennis wanted to actually do some of the firewood processing in a building instead of being outside in the elements.)
    - Traci Pederson with Pequot Planning and Zoning emailed with numerous questions about the permit:
      - She was reviewing an older survey from 2020 and asked that we make some handwritten updates to it as we had added two small woodsheds, etc.
      - She asked what the building would be used for – what would be the purpose?
        - In the response to Traci, it was documented that the building would be used to accommodate a firewood processing business as well as storage.
          - Numerous questions then ensued because firewood processing was documented and because there is no residence on the property.
          - Our address is in a Rural Residential zoning, and firewood processing is not listed as an activity in that zone. It's not listed at all- so not allowed nor disallowed, it's simply not listed.
          - Because the building would be used for firewood processing, and because there is no residence on the property zoned Rural Residential, the city's consultant, Thomas Roloff of Sourcewell, commented that he believed we should instead apply for a Conditional Use Permit if we wanted to construct the third pole building.

- Per the city's recommendation, we attended the January 2025 meeting of the Planning Commission (virtually) to speak to our case as we didn't feel a conditional use permit (CUP) was necessary as the firewood processing done is very small scale/minimal, no employees on site, no customers, etc. It is true we do have a business, a sole proprietorship, but, again, very small scale. We were hoping to be able to just apply for a land use permit (regular building permit).
  - The result of that meeting was that our request for a land use permit was denied and we were told if we wanted to pursue a permit for another building that would be used for firewood processing, an updated survey would be needed, along with an application for a CUP and that the 'closest' designation for our zoning is that of a lumberyard based on Thomas Roloff's opinion.
  - We would then need to meet with the Planning Commission on our request for a CUP.
  - We chose to not pursue the construction of a third pole building and submitted nothing further to the city.
  
- In July/August 2025 we revisited this topic as we wanted to close the loop from January. We requested a survey of the property per the city's recommendation back in January of 2025.
  
- The updated survey was sent to the city on 9/19/2025, along with a request to put a storage container on the facility (instead of building another pole building on the property).
  - Traci Pederson of Pequot Planning and Zoning indicated that the application would be provided to the Planning Commission for review and that it would be discussed in their meeting on September 22<sup>nd</sup> under the Planning and Zoning portion of the meeting. We were not able to attend the meeting but we provided a document outlining we merely wanted this storage container to keep equipment in.
  - Traci responded that our request would be reviewed in the meeting but that the question still remains of commercial use on a property that is zoned as Rural Residential.
    - Dennis replied to Traci's email indicated that, again, the property is not solely used for commercial use. We store our boat there (and other recreational items) as the reason we initially purchased the property was for storage of recreational items as well as enjoyment of

the land. The firewood processing is a secondary use and just began a few years ago. It is very small scale.

- The Planning Commission (PC) reviewed the application for the storage container, the updated survey and the 2020 site suitability information along with a document outlining the intended use of the parcel.
  - The PC denied the application in their 9/22/2025 meeting based on concerns regarding the primary and proposed use of the parcel, which does not align with the allowed uses under current zoning regulations for Rural Residential. The intent and purpose of the rural residential zone is for current and future residential uses as described in the Purpose/Intent of the Rural Residential Zone and further categorized within the Land Use Matrix.
  - Our property is zoned Rural Residential (RR) and under this zoning designation, while an accessory structure may be allowed without a primary dwelling, our application shows multiple accessory structures with no intention to construct a primary dwelling as stated in a letter we submitted to the city dated 9/22/2025 as well as in previous communications. Additionally, the described use of the property – storage and processing of firewood for both personal use and partial commercial sales (approx. 40%) falls outside of what is permitted in the RR zone.
  - The city further commented that their zoning use matrix specifies which uses are allowed, conditionally permitted, or excluded within each zone. In the Rural Residential Zone:
    - “Commercial Use” - “other” is excluded
    - Home Occupation provisions cannot be applied, as these require the presence of a primary dwelling.
  - Given the absence of a primary residence and the stated commercial activity, the proposed use cannot be approved under the zoning regulations.
- Given all of the above, we spoke with Traci on Monday, October 6<sup>th</sup> about our next steps. In that discussion we agreed to be added to the 10/27/2025 Planning Commission meeting to again discuss the property on County 16 and our use of it as, even though we understand our Rural Residential zoning and the permitted use of it, we do not feel our small hobby business is the same as a full scale ‘commercial’ operation and feel that our firewood processing should be allowed, conditionally, for a period of time.

- In advance of the October Planning Commission meeting, we have actively engaged with our neighbors on County Road 16 about our firewood processing on the property. These neighbors are familiar with what we are doing and are fine with our use of the property as, again, this is not a large-scale, full-time activity taking place on the property but instead a small-scale part-time operation.
  - Our neighbors have signed letters, for city review, indicating they approve our use of the property and also would be in favor of the city granting conditional use of the property for the firewood processing.
  - Note that the primary use of the property remains for storage and personal enjoyment of the acreage as it includes walking trails, bonfire pit, and a food plot for wildlife.

Tate and Linda Neumann  
4677 County Road 16  
Pequot Lakes, MN 56472

9/26/2025

To Whom It May Concern

We know Dennis Paulson, our neighbor, and are familiar with his firewood processing. We support what he is doing on his property and also are supportive of him obtaining a conditional use permit (CUP) that would enable him to continue his firewood processing.

Tate Neumann

218 851 4207

Scott and Catherine Peterson  
4751 County Road 16  
Pequot Lakes, MN 56472

9/26/2025

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We know Dennis Paulson, our neighbor, and are familiar with his firewood processing. We support what he is doing on his property and also are supportive of him obtaining a conditional use permit (CUP) that would enable him to continue his firewood processing.

Catherine Peterson 9.28.25

Jonathan Worre  
Parcel ID: 29020520  
County Road 16  
Pequot Lakes, MN 56472

9/26/2025

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Jonathan worre

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