



January 14, 2025

RE: Support for HB1182

Dear Chairman Ruby and members of the House Transportation Committee:

My name is Rebecca Udem and for the past four years, I served the Oakes community as our economic developer. I also am the Founder and Executive Director of Growing Small Towns, a nonprofit dedicated to helping small communities thrive.

Through both roles, I've spent countless hours working with Hearthside Vineyard and Winery to help them overcome the challenges of starting a new business as nuanced and complicated as theirs.

I strongly support HB1182 which would create a safe and legal stream crossing on the only road that provides public access to the land on which Hearthside's vineyard is already planted. Until the land was purchased and slated for development, there was no clear economic need to build this infrastructure.

Now, not only does the lack of a properly-coded crossing impede Hearthside's ability to build its facility, but it also prohibits any other businesses from starting in this location in the future. All avenues for getting this infrastructure built through local means have been explored and exhausted; rural resources for these types of projects are limited and priority will always be given to emergencies or what's perceived to be higher ROI investments.

Haley Moen returning to Oakes to continue her family's farming legacy as a 26-year-old woman with a business plan that is, by all measures, a game changer for our town, is what all small communities want. This infrastructure doesn't just help one individual build their dream; it's a strategic investment in the future of Oakes. With a local amenity of this caliber, we will see an economic impact through increased visitorship, word-of-mouth marketing of Oakes, and easier resident recruitment.

I strongly urge the committee's recommendation of a "do pass" on HB1182.

Sincerely,

Rebecca J. Udem  
Growing Small Towns  
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