



February 16, 2022

***Sent via Email**

The Honorable Representative Nelson, Chair
State Government Finance and Elections Committee
585 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support for HF 2162

Dear Chair Masin and Members of the Division:

On behalf of Olmsted County, thank you for hearing [HF 2162](#) and thank you to Representative Torkelson for authoring this legislation. The bill helps address an issue that counties are experiencing across the state – increasing need and expenses associated with the cleanup of blighted and environmentally contaminated tax-forfeiture properties.

When taxes go unpaid on a property in Minnesota, the land is turned over to the state and counties become responsible for administering a tax-forfeited land program to make the land productive again. In recent years, counties are seeing costs to clean up these tax-forfeited parcels that are higher than revenues the land sales generate. Olmsted County is experiencing an extreme example of this with a property that was tax-forfeited in Northeast Haverhill Township.

Olmsted County has begun cleanup efforts and has been able to access the state Petrofund Program for about \$80,000 to remediate the underground storage tanks. The county has explored other state programs, but has not qualified for additional assistance, mainly because the cleanup effort does not have an economic development component or create new jobs. The county has spent approximately \$200,000 to address immediate environmental threats, such as sealing the well and asbestos abatement. Future expenses to complete the remediation activities are estimated at \$600,000. These efforts will include removal of tires and other solid waste, demolition of buildings, and further asbestos abatement.

HF 2162 authorizes county boards to retain proceeds generated from forfeited land sales to cleanup other tax-forfeited properties. This policy change and potential grant programs (like the pilot program authorized in [HF 2280](#)) help counties address the costs of cleanup activities on tax forfeiture properties and are vital to ensuring these lands will be safe and productive for the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation and please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Thein".

Mark Thein, Chair
Olmsted County Board of Commissioners
thein.mark@co.olmsted.mn.us