Good evening Board members and citizens. My name is John Hoehn. I am president of the Van Atta Neighborhood Association.

The Van Atta neighborhood is a rural residential area. It is rich in wildlife and open space. Our members are avid walkers, hikers, park users, wildlife enthusiasts, and, of course, bicyclists.

So how do we stand on the issue of off-road paths and the widening Van Atta Road? Is this the way to protect and enjoy our rural open space? No, we think not. We vigorously oppose both the off-road paths and the widening of Van Atta Road.

The pathway Master Plan galvanized our neighborhood and sparked the formation of our association. At our first official meeting last weekend, 90 percent of the members signed petitions opposing the off-road pathways and widened shoulders. I have those petitions with me this evening.

Why do we oppose pathway Master Plan for our neighborhood?

1. First, the bike paths convert open space to asphalt. The pathways are not greenways. They are not rails to trails. They are small asphalt roads. They are designed to take the weight of an ambulance or heavy truck. Each mile of pathway is one acre of asphalt.

2. Second, these asphalt roads cut through prime wetlands and wildlife habitat. The Van Atta area is a quiet refuge for shy wildlife, wildlife such as ruffed grouse, turkey, sandhill crane, hawk, fox, and coyote. After our successful open space millage, it is shocking that the pathway Master Plan would put a asphalt roads in this roadless area.

3. Third, the Master Plan puts the asphalt pathways on private land. The Township simply has no right to put pathways on private property. If a pathway can be put on our property, a pathway to your rose garden may be next. Property owners uniformly oppose this plan.

Widening Van Atta Road is not a solution either:

4. Widening the road will increase traffic speeds. Faster speeds will reduce the safety of walkers and bikers.

5. In addition, bike lanes do nothing for walkers. State Law gives walkers no right to use a roadway, bike lane or not. Apparently, if a walker is hit in a bike lane, the walker is at fault.

6. Finally, Van Atta Road is a designated Michigan Natural Beauty Road. The giant trees that line the road are an asset for all Township residents. Widening the road is likely to kill the trees that give the road its natural beauty. We already lost 4 giant oaks in the last 3 years.

We ask the Board to remove the off-road pathways and widened shoulders from the Van Atta neighborhood. Residents do want to find ways to improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists-- but not at the cost of open space, ancient trees, and faster traffic.

Thank you very much.