

What we are Losing

BY: Philippe Jordi - Aug 26, 2015 MV TIMES

[Philippe Jordi, Island Housing Trust \(IHT\) executive director, delivered the following remarks at the nonprofit's annual summer brunch on August 16.](#)

Have you ever stood outside on a clear Vineyard night and gazed at the mass of stars the Island sky offers us? I know I have, and I know that what I find fascinating about the night sky is that if you try to focus on an individual star, it immediately disappears from sight. The only way to appreciate the magnitude of each star is to take in the expanse of the night sky as a whole.

Last month, I heard about a third grader, Jane – she's a flourishing violinist with a vivid imagination and a ton of friends at the West Tisbury School. Her mom is a librarian at the public library, and has just published her first novel. They are interesting, artistic, and engaged members of our community. But they can't afford to live here anymore, and had to move away to Boston this summer.

In case you're keeping score, in that one story, we've lost two stars from our night sky. I could stand here and tell you similar stories for the rest of the day – I know far too many of them. But I won't. What I will tell you is that we can't afford the losses.

We are losing our neighbors because of the housing crisis. People and businesses we rely on every day to make this place work – schoolteachers and social workers, truck drivers and landscapers, Steamship Authority workers, shopkeepers, and artists – we need these people to keep our community and economy functioning and viable. What we risk is not only losing two stars, but our entire night sky.

Stories like Jane's break my heart. They break my heart open so wide that 10 years ago I started the Island Housing Trust, and I've dedicated my life's work to solving the Island's housing crisis by creating a pool of affordable, energy-efficient homes that will serve our community for generations to come.

Many people don't realize that Martha's Vineyard is one of the poorest counties in Massachusetts. One in four of our neighbors spend 50 percent or more of their income on housing costs.

Recently, an Island-wide housing-needs assessment reported that over the next 10 years there will be a tripling of people over the age of 65, who will need more of our services. Meanwhile, over the past 10 years, an increasing number of younger working families have been priced out of the housing market and forced to leave.

This trend is placing a significant strain on both the community and the local economy we depend on. And if we lose this essential part of our community, we lose the pulse that keeps this place beating all year long.

I think there's a knee-jerk reaction not to hear stories like Jane's. More than 85,000 people come to the Vineyard every summer to get away from the sad stories of the world. I get that. It's much easier when we focus on the sweet stuff that the Island has to offer. But the housing crisis hurts us all, year-rounders, summer residents, and visitors alike. Without a strong and stable year-round community, our Island won't be the diverse and vibrant place we all know and love.

At the Island Housing Trust we believe that sustainable housing is central to preserving the values and way of life on the Vineyard. We are committed to creating 120 new, permanently affordable ownership and rental housing opportunities by the year 2020. Over these next five years, over 300 of our neighbors who directly contribute to the Island's social and economic well-being will have a home they can afford.

Martha's Vineyard is not so different from its night sky. It's the whole, intangible spirit of this place that we love. Believe me, if we focus only on the sweet spots, and lose sight of the whole, those sweet spots – just like the night stars – will surely fade.

Please join me in keeping our island shining, full and magnificent, just like the Vineyard night sky.