

The Inquirer and Mirror

Letterbag

Island losing its charm as we seek more, more, more

To the Editor:

Nantucket is a marvelous, unique island loved by residents and visitors alike. I am very concerned that the bulk of Nantucket is losing its charm, the most vital parts of our island are being lost and that it will not remain the beloved spot that has captured the hearts of so many.

We are collectively abusing it and we will soon regret that. Our Earth is a fragile planet and we are also threatening it. Global warming is created by man polluting the air, filling the oceans with trash, causing destructive wildfires and in many ways reducing the carrying capacity of resources we all depend upon.

Our island can act locally to secure these resources to set an example for other communities to do the same. We can collectively contribute to control of the bigger global issues. "Think globally and act locally." We have the tools to do this.

I believe we have a head start. Islanders years before us sewered town and Sconset, and created a municipal water supply. Summer residents founded the Nantucket Land Council. Voters joined together and created our Nantucket Land Bank. Zoning and the Historic District Commission were established.

Now there are many threats. We are talking about widening roads for increased numbers of automobiles and bigger trucks. Sadly, zoning has been changed to allow greater density. Tourism is flourishing and year-round housing has been bought and converted to vacation homes at a rate which spells disaster.

The workers, our community of friends, providing vital maintenance and services, are forced to move to the Cape for affordable housing. They commute here on fast ferries.

Our sole-source aquifer is being polluted by septic systems and fertilizers, not to mention the moors being a collection of waste, dumped by those who are "too busy" to make it all the way to Madaket.

Traffic is clogging all roads and parking is nigh impossible. A third cable to deliver electricity from the mainland soon will be necessary. Affordable housing for essential teachers, nurses, carpenters, gardeners, clerks, etc. is vanishing with the above activities. Little is being done to alleviate this hardship.

We have reached our carrying capacity, but we can stop this. We have many tools: first, a strong HDC which must not lower its preservation standards, good zoning which can be a tool to afford-able housing. We need to use

these and recognize our limited carrying capacity. If we grow any more I think we will lose our strong community, and also our popularity which definitely impacts our economy.

The attraction of Nantucket is that it is a small island, no congestion, some solitude, treasured historic architecture, globally-threatened sandplain grasslands, rare plant species and birds, and views of distant horizons.

We all have our treasured ideas of Nantucket. Time is of the essence. We must do more to control growth.

The "progress" we see should be warning enough. More of this "progress" will ruin what Nantucket stands for, and it's within our abilities to slow the first or second house from becoming an investment by people who are strictly in the investment world and may never have set their feet on the island's terrain.

Let's all act together, now. Let's try to save what our fathers and their fathers left for us, a treasure which is eroding fast.

LINDA HOLLAND

Investor-owned vacation rentals put island at risk

To the Editor:

The tradition of renting one's home or summer house should continue to exist. But this long-time practice has subtly changed over the years, culminating in nearly 20 percent of our total housing inventory devoted to short-term rentals. This opportunity has captured off-island investors' attention, a group that isn't interested in using a property for any other reason than as an investment.

Our community is one of the island's best attributes. The culture of return on investment will benefit few but promises to hurt the island and the people who live here. We want year-round and vacation homes, not generic investments. If we continue to let investors buy up all our houses, are we really better off? I don't think so.

For those who remember, year-round islanders once filled today's prime vacation rental areas like Pilgrim Road, Delaney Road, Vestal Street and North Liberty Street. With low interest rates and accommodating local policies, many more homes and neighborhoods will sell and become investor-owned vacation rentals with hotel-like amenities. At what point is it too much? How often do we say goodbye to islanders being displaced? And what does our community look like

10 or 20 years if we do nothing?

It's no surprise that some Realtors are opposed to restricting investors buying up properties on the island. What is surprising is that most people, including some Realtors, don't realize investors aren't just buying big, expensive houses. They are quickly moving into year-round neighborhoods. Talk to your friends in Miacomet. Look at the real-estate listings. They are looking for investors, not year-round families.

We can't keep rolling along and allowing our community to change for the worse. I'm glad ACK Now is actively trying to draw everyone's attention to what's happening, and I'm happy to serve on its board. It's time to put our community ahead of the bottom line.

TOBIAS GLIDDEN
Chair, ACK Now