



# Real Property Reuse Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Thursday, January 19, 2017**

Present: Councilors Albright (Chair), Lennon, Brousal-Glaser, Gentile, Crossley, and Danberg

Absent: Councilors Fuller and Kalis

Also present: Councilors Harney and Sangiolo

City staff present: Ouida Young (Associate City Solicitor), Barney Heath (Director of Planning & Development), James Freas (Deputy Director of Planning & Development), Ted Jerdee (Director of Utilities), Nathan Robinson (Housing Development Planner), and Jim McGonagle (Public Works Department)

### **#360-16      Reuse of the Stanton Avenue water tower site**

DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT submitting on October 7, 2016 a letter stating that the water tower site located at Stanton Avenue declared surplus by the COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC WORKS on September 15, 2016, should be declared unnecessary for municipal purposes pursuant to Ordinance Section 2-7. [10/10/16 @ 10:48 PM]

**Action:**      Real Property Reuse Approved 4-0-1 (Lennon abstaining, Gentile not voting)

**Note:**      Deputy Director of Planning & Development James Freas provided the Committee with the attached PowerPoint presentation on the Stanton Avenue Water Tower Site. The site is 16,900 square feet and bordered by private property on all sides with no access to a roadway. The site abuts both the Golda Meir House and the Brae Burn Country Club properties. There is a decommissioned water tower on the site. The Department of Public Works no longer requires the property for its operation and no other City Department found the property useful due to its size and limited access to a roadway. Therefore, at its last meeting, the Real Property Reuse Committee took a straw vote to approve making the property available for sale or lease, schedule, to waive the formation of a Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG) and to schedule a public hearing to officially move forward with the process of declaring the property available for lease or sale.

The Planning & Development Department is recommending that the Committee approve a Council Order that includes language stating the site should be used for affordable housing, as it is a landlocked site that abuts existing affordable housing. There is no access to the site except through Braeburn Country Club or Gold Meir House. There is a strong possibility that Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly (JCHE) would respond to an RFP with a proposal to expand the Golda Meir House by utilizing the water tower site. Newton's Housing Strategy identifies specific parcels that could accommodate new affordable housing developments and the Stanton Avenue water tower site was among seven sites that were identified as priority sites. As evidenced in the attached PowerPoint presentation, Newton has a need for affordable housing development particularly senior housing developments. In addition, the Planning Department is recommending

that the Council Order include language related to rezoning the water tower site to facilitate development of the site, that the development of the site incorporate "green design" principles, a requirement that the purchaser of the site remove the water tower according to the specifications provided by the City within six months of purchase, and that there be no minimum sale price set for the property. A draft Council Order was provided to the Committee as part of the Planning Department's memo on the reuse of the Stanton Avenue water tower site.

The Chair opened the public hearing and Lisa Coll, 103 Stanton Avenue, asked what the redundancy plan is for water flow in the area now that the tower is decommissioned. Utilities Director Ted Jerdee explained that the sole purpose of the water tower was to provide sufficient fire flow to the area. In recent years upgrades to the water system have resulted in the City meeting the ISO fire flow requirements making the need for the water tank obsolete. Ms. Coll asked if there were any emergency plans in place if there is water service interruption. The recent upgrades to the water system include a complete 12" loop around the area of Stanton Avenue and the MWRA has added additional pumping capacity at the Commonwealth Avenue pump station.

Arieh Coll, 103 Stanton Avenue, highlighted points that are outlined in the attached letter from Mr. and Mrs. Coll, which was submitted to the Committee for the meeting. Mr. Coll's concerns are related to traffic and parking issues that exist on Stanton Avenue and are likely to exacerbate the problems if Gold Meir House expands. His letter outlines some possible solutions to the traffic issues like creating a traffic loop using a paper road on Golda Meir House property and/or creating a resident parking only zone on Stanton Avenue. The letter also requests a traffic study and possibly a traffic light at Washington Street and Stanton Avenue along with increased public safety measures. Mr. Coll is also concerned that an expansion of the Golda Meir House will result in the loss of some of the community feel and character of the neighborhood. For further details related to Mr. Coll's comments, please refer to the attached letter.

Amy Schectman, President and Chief Executive Officer of JCHE, is very excited about the opportunity presented by the sale of the water tower property. It is the goal of the JCHE to provide affordable housing to seniors and if JCHE obtains the water tower property, they can expand the number of units at Golda Meir House. JCHE is currently investing \$30 million on the modernization of the existing units at Golda Meir House. Ms. Schectman stated that she heard the previous speakers and realizes that community input is essential in planning a successful project. Golda Meir House tries to be good to the neighborhood and has a statement of neighborhood etiquette for its residents. If JCHE is able to purchase the water site property, they will work with the neighbors to achieve full support of an expansion of the Golda Meir House. Committee members asked Ms. Schectman if it is possible to give seniors from Newton preference for housing at Golda Meir House. Ms. Schectman responded that JCHE would give as much preference to Newton residents as State law allows. Ms. Schectman will provide the current number of Newton residents at Golda Meir House.

The Chair clarified that the Real Property Reuse Committee is not voting on the possible expansion of the Golda Meir House. If JCHE submits a response to the City's RFP and the Mayor opts to sell the property to the JCHE, an expansion would require JCHE to obtain a 40B permit or a

special permit from the City.

Bill Shaevel, Vice-chair of JCHE, added that the JCHE is very supportive and committed to the City of Newton. Harold Tubman, Member of the Policy Board of the JCHE, stated that Golda Meir House is a wonderful place for seniors.

Sean McLaughlin, General Manager of Braeburn Country Club, supports the affordable housing provided by Golda Meir but has concerns about the traffic generated as a result of the housing. Mr. McLaughlin also has some concerns about the City's easement through Braeburn property to the water tower and what would happen with the easement when the property is sold. Associate City Solicitor Ouida Young's understanding from the attorney who handled the easement is that the easement only grants the City access to the water tower for the purposes of maintenance. If someone other than the immediate abutters, who have access to the property through their own property, were to buy the property they would need to negotiate with either of the direct abutters for access to the water tower property.

Maura Marone, Woodland Apartments, values the peace and quiet in the back of Stanton Avenue by the water tower site. The character of the neighborhood is going to change with a loud construction project. Ms. Marone would suggest that if the Golda Meir House expands that the City require construction to begin later than allowed by ordinance. She also asked that the City look into any safety issues with the move of the antenna. There is a habitat around the water tower that should be protected.

Richard Fahey, Braeburn Country Club Board of Directors, is interested in the water tower site. He would like the Council Order and RFP language opened up to allow Braeburn Country Club an opportunity to determine if it is in the Club's best interest to purchase the water tower property.

Lisa Coll asked that the Council Order be written to allow broader opportunities for the sale of the water tower property. If the Council Order is limited to affordable housing, it would seem the only bidder would be JCHE. Ms. Young explained that due to the landlocked nature of the site, it is pretty obvious who the two likely purchasers of the property would be and how they would utilize the site. It is perfectly acceptable that the City Council guide the Mayor's Office in the direction that they think is appropriate for the site. The Mayor may not opt to go in that direction and choose to broaden the RFP.

James Freas stated the Planning Department was contacted by an attorney representing Braeburn Country Club but the City did not reach out to the abutters. The water tower property was identified in the Housing Strategy as a priority site for the development of affordable housing. The Planning Department is working through that process and will do an RFP to identify a buyer for the property understanding that there are only two abutting property owners not withstanding the fact that someone else could come in an offer a sizable amount of money to either of the abutters to get access to the water tower site. It is unlikely that will happen because of the size of the water tower parcel and the unlikelihood that either abutter would be willing to grant access.

A Committee member questioned if and how the water tower site would make a significant difference to the development potential of Golda Meir House. Planning Director Barney Heath gave the City overview, which is that the site was in the Housing Strategy as an affordable housing potential site and there are very limited choices that the City has for affordable housing sites with a proven developer that could get the financing and make housing happen at a site. The City is limited from the outset with the universe of options. JCHE is a proven entity that has a great reputation, access to financing, and could potentially put housing on this site; therefore, from the City's perspective it was a priority.

A JCHE real estate representative explained that the site is fairly constrained partially due to the need for parking that is there. The additional land would allow Golda Meir House to address circulation, parking, and traffic on the site. Without the water tower property Golda Meir House likely could not do an expansion. Golda Meir House has done a conceptual study with a team of students and will hire an architect if they are able to purchase the water tower site.

It was suggested that the Council Order should include a monetary sale price of no less than \$250,000 set for the property, language stating that the purchaser will work with the City on relocating the antenna currently located on the water tower, a statement that new affordable housing resulting from the acquisition of the property should be listed on the State Housing Inventory List (SHIL). A number of committee members felt that as the City is requiring the purchaser of the property to remove the water tower at their expense, and the property will now become part of the City's tax rolls there should be no minimum price set. All committee members supported adding language related to the relocation of the antenna. A statement related to ensuring that any affordable units resulting from the sale of the property are qualified to be listed on the SHIL will be included in the RFP for the sale of the property.

Committee members supported adding language that any affordable housing developed as a result of the sale should give Newton residents priority access to the housing to the maximum extent allowed. In addition, there should be language related to improving traffic and parking congestion in the area of Stanton Avenue. Stanton Avenue is a private way; therefore, there may be some legal issues with adding parking restrictions. Myra Marshall, Director of Golda Meir House, pointed on that there are currently parking restrictions on Stanton Avenue to discourage commuter parking. All traffic issues will be addressed during development review for a special permit or 40B Comprehensive Permit. There was a request that the phrase "green design" in the draft council order be replaced with something like sustainable design.

At this point the public hearing closed.

Councilor Crossley moved approval of a council order that includes the following language:

- A statement recommending that the highest and best use of the property is to expand affordable housing.
- A requirement that the purchaser demolish the water tower at their expense within six months of closing according to the specifications provided by the Department of

Public Works.

- A statement that the purchaser must work with the City to relocate the existing City antenna located on the water tower.
- A statement that the developed units be reserved for Newton residents to the maximum extent allowed by state law.
- A condition that the property be rezoned to the appropriate zone before the issuance of the RFP.
- Substitute the phrase green design in the Council Order with something like sustainable design or durable energy efficient design.
- Inclusion of language stating that the reason there is no minimum price for the property is the City's commitment to creating permanently affordable housing.
- That the City will provide information to a developer regarding existing site conditions as long as the information can be gathered in-house within existing department budgets.
- Inclusion of language that addresses the parking and traffic in the neighborhood related to the Golda Meir site

The Committee voted to approve the motion by a vote of four in favor and one abstention. Councilor Lennon abstained as he was unavailable for a portion of the discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan S. Albright, Chair

# Real Property Reuse Committee

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## **STANTON AVENUE WATER TOWER SITE**



**16,900 Square feet**  
**.4 acres**

Stanton Avenue Water Tower

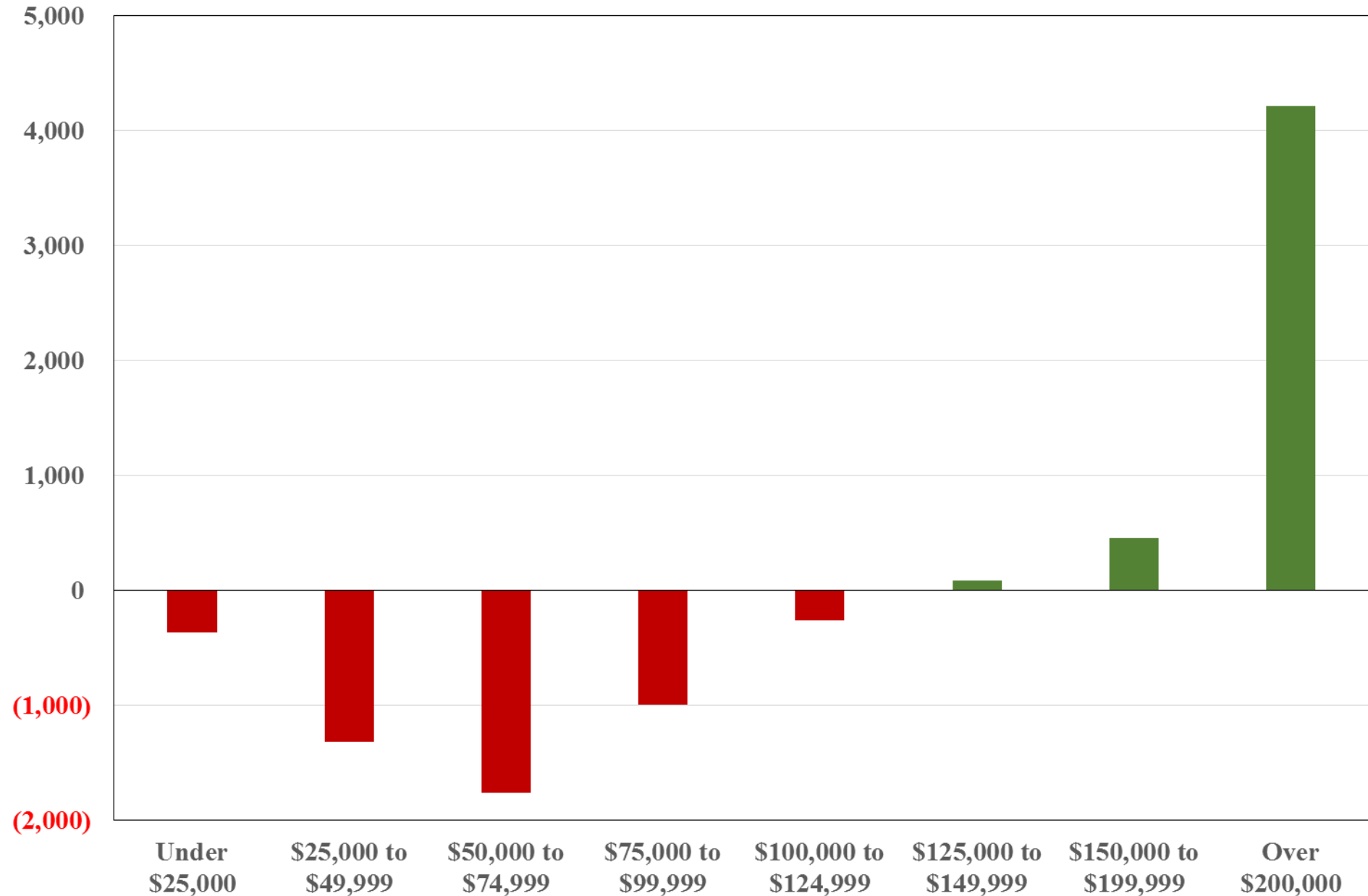


(Image is the Countryside Road Tower)



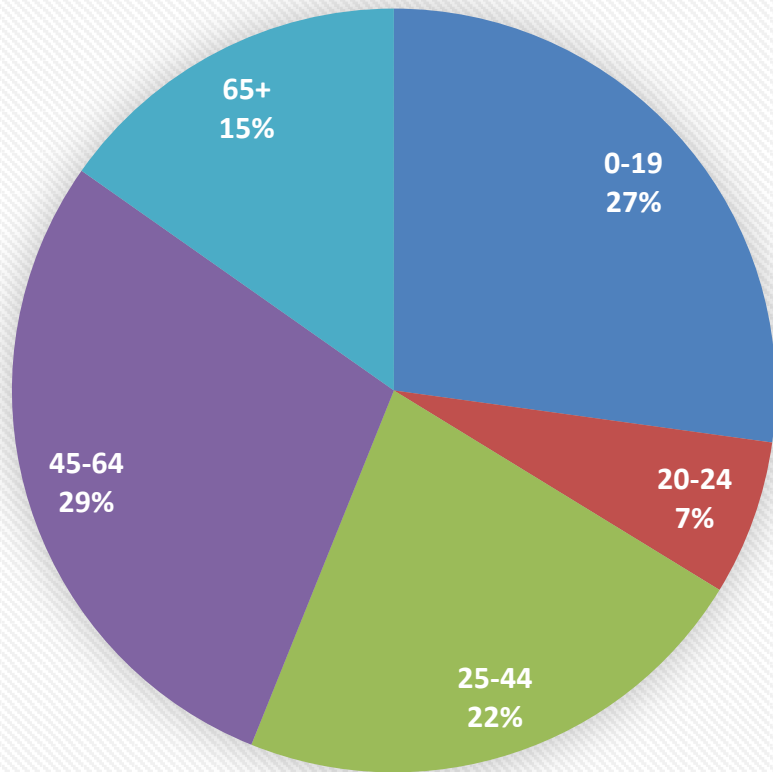
# HOUSEHOLDS, BY INCOME

## 2000-2013 City of Newton

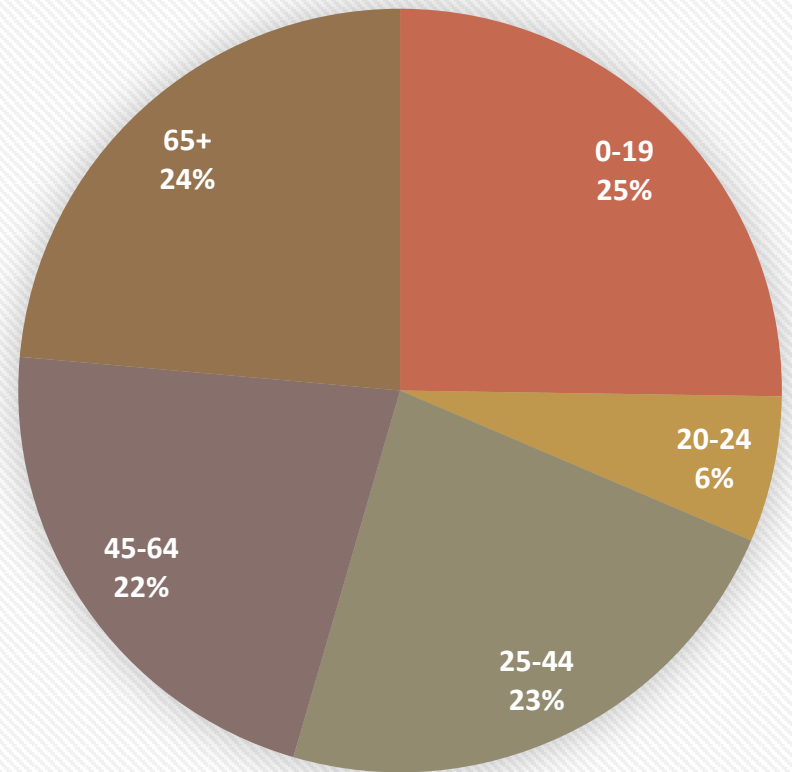


# Population by Age

2010

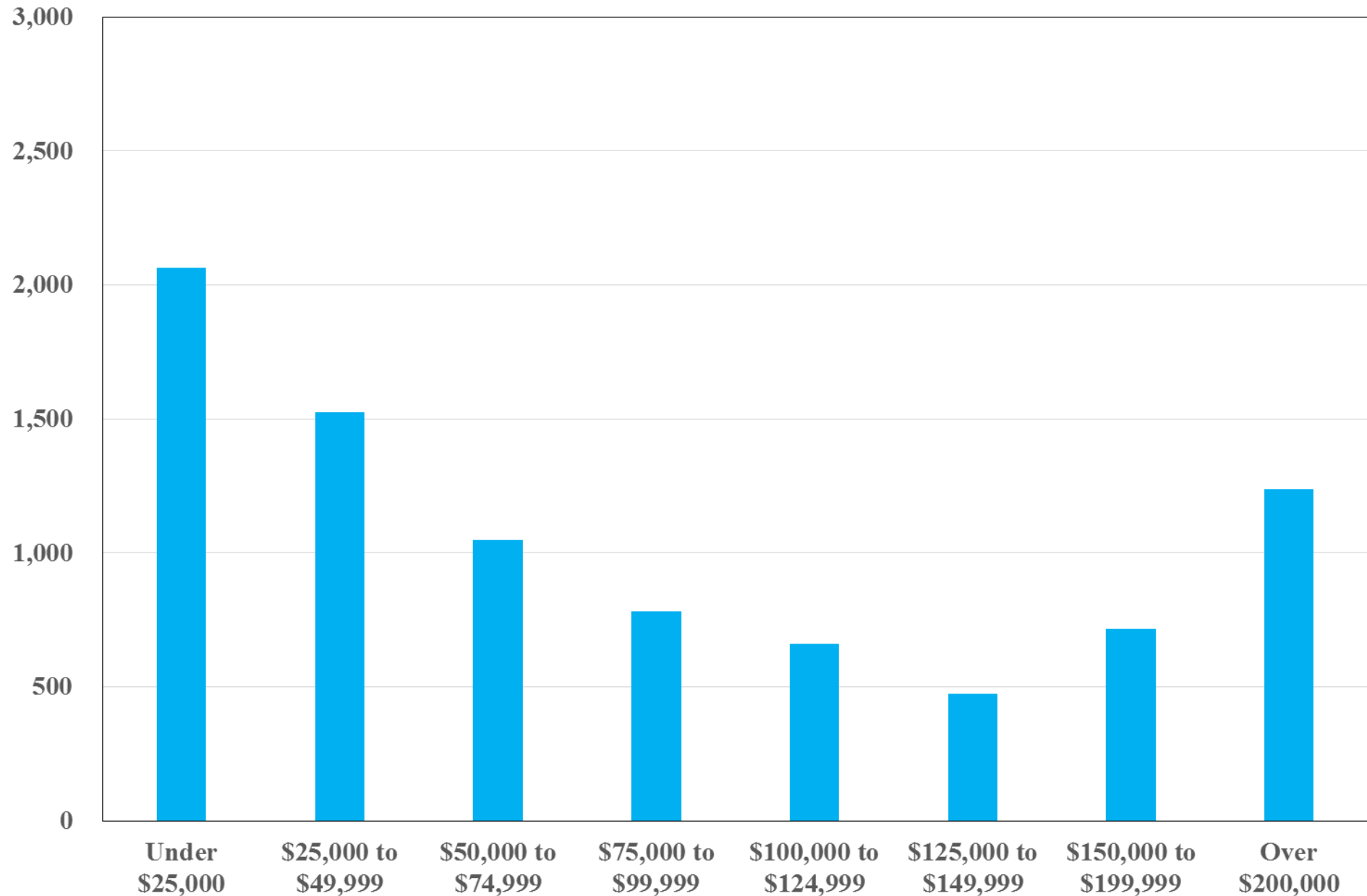


2030



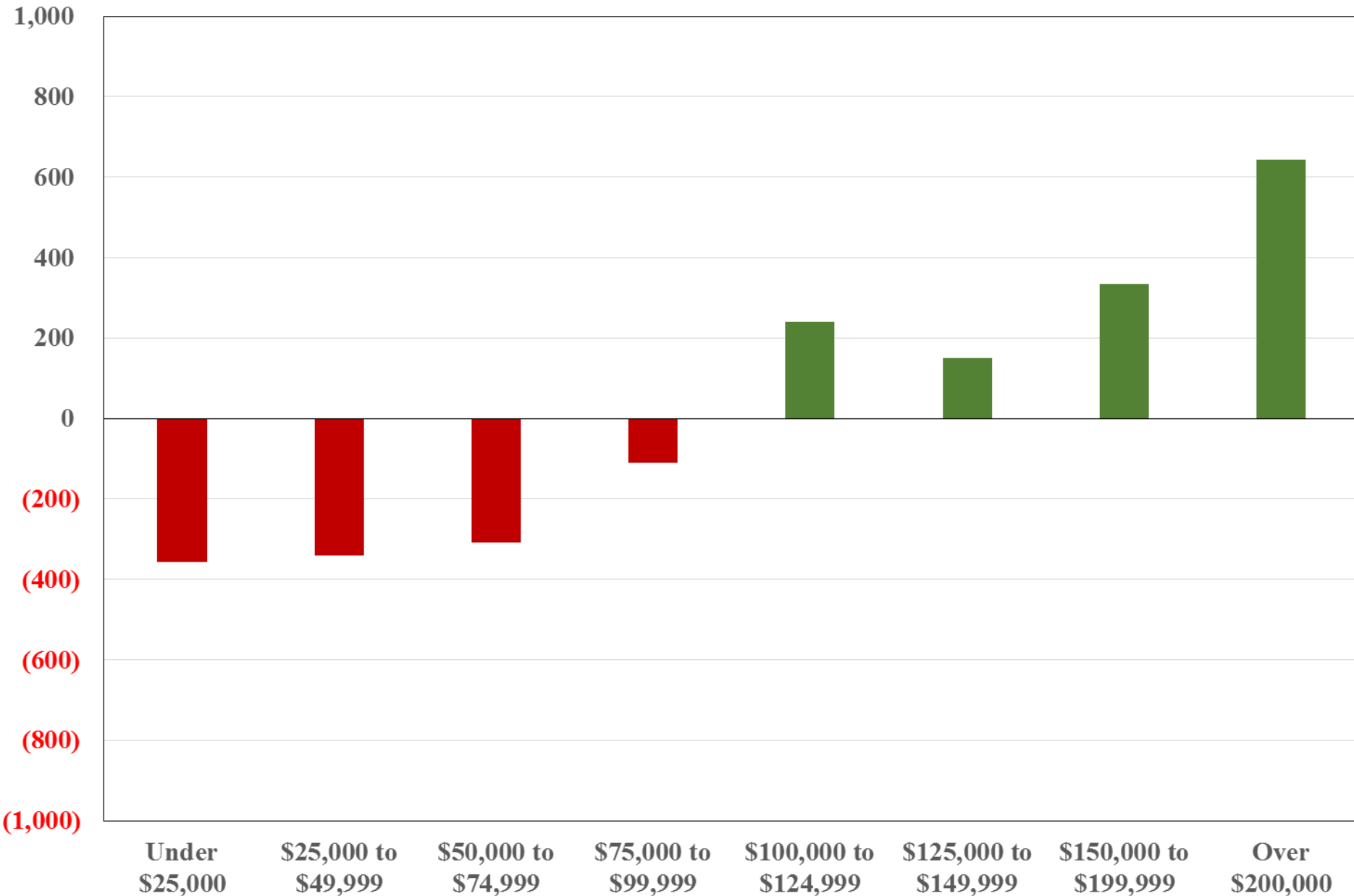
# SENIOR (65+) HOUSEHOLDS, BY INCOME

## 2013 City of Newton



# SENIOR (65+) HOUSEHOLDS, BY INCOME

## 2000-2013 City of Newton



# Proposed Council Order

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- Sale of the property with no minimum price;
- Requirement that the purchaser of the property tear down the water tower within 6 months of acquisition according to the specifications provided by the Department of Public Works;

# Proposed Council Order

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- That the use of the site should be affordable housing;
- That development of the site should adhere to green design principles; and
- That the property should be transferred with the appropriate zoning and with what site data and information the City is able to provide in order to facilitate development of the site.

- Questions?

Lisa & Arieh Coll  
103 Stanton Ave.  
Auburndale, MA 02466

**To: Real Property Reuse Committee**  
**Subject: #360-16 – Reuse of the Stanton Avenue**  
**Water Tower Site**

**Public Hearing on Thursday January 19, 2017**

Real Property Reuse Committee Members:  
Chair – Councilor Susan Albright, Ward #2  
Vice-Chair – Councilor David Kalis, Ward #8  
Other Members – Councilors  
Scott Lennon, Ward #1  
Barbara Brousal-Glaser, Ward #3  
Leonard Gentile, Ward #4  
Deborah Crossley, Ward #5  
Victoria Danberg, Ward #6  
Ruthanne Fuller, Ward #7

cc: **Ward 4 Councilors \***

Jay Harney [jharney@newtonma.gov]  
May Mah Sangiolo [asangiolo@newtonma.gov]

Dear Members of the Real Property Reuse Committee:

We understand that the Committee is addressing the future use of the City-owned water tower land at 160 Stanton Avenue that has been deemed no longer needed by the City of Newton. As residents of the neighborhood since 1998, we wish to bring several observations and concerns to the Committee's attention because the Department of Planning and Development has recommended that the land be designated for affordable housing use. Use for affordable housing would make Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly a strong contender to purchase the property, so that they could expand the adjacent Golda Meir House complex. While we support the creation of affordable housing for the elderly in the City, there are a number of considerations relative to this site that should be taken into account if such a recommendation is to be adopted by the Committee.

It is our understanding that Golda Meir House presently contains approximately 199 units, and according to a 2014 press report, JCHE is interested in expanding that by approximately 50-60 units if the water tower land becomes available to it.



Between Golda Meir House and Arbor Point next door there are already 380 apartment units – making this one of the most dense areas in Newton. At the same time, the neighborhood that comprises Longfellow Avenue, Stanton Avenue, Washington Street and the Day Street neighborhood, offers one of the few clusters of naturally affordable family houses left in the city. We would like to make sure that the committee takes into consideration the effects of increased density and the accompanying burdens that additional housing units would bring to this wonderful neighborhood.

The Golda Meir House is already under renovation, and this construction project is set to take 22 months. Additional large-scale construction for expansion of the complex would mean more years of loud, disruptive, and environmentally hazardous construction that would be a significant burden to the neighbors.

Specific concerns arising from such an expansion that do not seem to have been recognized by the Planning and Development Department report are as follows:

**Stanton Avenue already cannot handle the traffic.**

- Stanton Avenue is a very narrow, two-way street. When people parallel park on the street, the road is effectively limited to one lane. Two cars driving in opposite directions cannot pass each other, requiring one to either back up or back down the hill. When snow narrows the road, parked cars turn the street into a one-way passage only, at times completely blocking passage in either direction. This is an especially big problem for emergency vehicles, sanitation trucks and snow plows. Possible solutions to this issue include: a) Golda Meir using it's "paper road" to create a traffic loop. Visitors to Golda Meir would drive up Stanton Avenue to park, but would exit the parking lot by driving down the paper road to Washington Street. b) Reducing the number of cars parked on Stanton Avenue with signs that only allow local residents with permits to park on the street.
- A traffic study should be done. It is already difficult to enter or exit Stanton Avenue from Washington Street even with existing traffic. A new traffic light should be considered at the intersection of Stanton Avenue and Washington Street given the extra traffic that will be created by an expansion of the Golda Meir apartments.
- The parking lot at the Golda Meir House is already too small. The complex does not have sufficient parking spots for daily visitors, which include a number of independent healthcare aids for the residents. As a result visitors parallel park on Stanton Avenue. Frequently these visiting vehicles block residents in the private homes from exiting their

driveways by car. An increase in units needs to provide for additional parking .

- Increased public safety measures. Many of the aging population of residents at Golda Meir house have diminished driving skills. Often, drivers (including residents, staff and guests) do not look both ways before exiting from the Golda Meir parking lot. Many often fail to come to a full stop before turning onto Stanton Avenue. Neighbors have even been forced off the road by residents who misjudge their proximity to oncoming traffic. Additionally, many Golda Meir residents walk daily on the street rather on the sidewalk, and are often unaware that a car is approaching behind them. There are also children that ride bicycles on the street. Reducing traffic on Stanton Avenue with an internal loop on the paper road would help (although not eliminate) some of these hazards.
- Noise – We would request that any new structure and related operations on Stanton Avenue not increase the noise levels in the neighborhood. Specifically, we would prefer that the sanitation truck pick-up area for a new Golda Meir building would be set back 200 feet off the road as it is today. This is a residential community so we request that Golda Meir be limited in their capacity to use or rent their common space for outside functions that will draw a large crowd. The neighborhood cannot handle the additional traffic or noise.
- Privacy – We would hope that JCHE would try to maintain the character of the neighborhood and provide arbor screening and take other means to preserve the beauty of the neighborhood as well as to enhance the privacy of the neighbors.

**We are concerned that JCHE currently does not provide enough services or supervision for its residents. How will they provide for an increased number of residents, especially if there is a new demographic involved?**

- On any given week, we have several encounters with elderly residents, many of whom appear to be in various stages of dementia. We often have to walk them back to Golda Meir house because they are lost. Some residents have difficulties in respecting the neighbor's privacy and property. We have seen many, many cases of inappropriate behavior (public urination, kleptomania, confrontational behavior, etc.) How will JCHE handle their increased case load?

We hope that the views and observations expressed above will assist the Committee in determining the disposition of the surplus water tower site and the effect of any

proposals for future use of the site and adjacent land on the neighborhood and on the city as a whole. Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,

Lisa & Arieh Coll  
Residents of 103 Stanton Ave.  
Auburndale, MA 02466

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