Housing is considered affordable if it consumes less than 30% of a household’s gross income. At higher levels, families must choose between housing and other basic needs and will struggle to weather financial setbacks. For 2009, housing costs continue to consume a large portion of families’ income, with substantial unemployment threatening Minnesotans.

The table above shows the number and percent of households in different income brackets that pay 30% or more of household income for rental or ownership costs. It illustrates that the burden of housing costs weighs more heavily on lower-income families.¹

Even before the current economic downturn, housing needs were severe. In 2007, 1 in 8 households spent at least half of their income on housing, up from 1 in 15 in 2000. Minnesota experienced the fastest increase of extremely cost burdened households of any state in the nation during this time period.²

In 2005-2007, about 78.5% of Mower County residents owned their home and 21.5% were renters. Of these, approximately 21.9% of homeowners and 43.9% of renters in Mower County spent 30% or more of their household income on housing.³
Lower-income households face extreme affordability challenges.

The chart below compares median earnings across different occupations to the income required to afford housing.4

**Housing Costs.** In Mower County, a median-priced home cost $92,375 in 2008, and the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment was $577 per month in 2009. Since 2001, home prices have increased by 23.2% and the fair market rent has increased by 38.7%.5

**Income.** In Mower County, a family of four with two full-time wage earners needs to earn a combined annual salary of $46,236 to afford the basic cost of living.6 The median household income for Mower County was $44,721 in 2007.7

**Jobs.** 36% of jobs in Mower County and counties nearby pay less than the regional wage required to afford basic needs.8 The average unemployment rate in Mower County was 7.5% in March, 2009, up from 4.6% in March 2006.9


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**Foreclosures in Minnesota**

- In Mower County in 2008, there were about 130 foreclosures, a 8.5% decrease from 2007.10
- Left unaddressed, abandoned foreclosed properties destabilize neighborhoods, erode the local tax base and drive up the costs of municipal services.
- Of homeowners seeking foreclosure counseling in 2008, three-quarters were considered to be low- and moderate-income. Half experienced a reduction of income before seeking counseling. 60% had prime mortgages.11

**Homelessness in Minnesota**

- On a single day in 2006, 342 people were sheltered in the Southeast Region, including 181 children.12
- Roughly 9,200 Minnesotans are homeless and 7,700 are precariously housed in temporary or unstable housing. 38% are children and youth.13
- 39% of Minnesota's homeless population cite the inability to afford housing as a primary reason for leaving previous housing.14

**Extreme Cost Burden**

- Approximately 24.9% of renter households pay at least half of their income on housing in Mower County.15
- For homeowner households in Mower County, 5.9% pay at least half of their income on housing.16