

County Homes Rank 5th-Least Affordable

**Michael Coit, *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*
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Despite falling home prices, Sonoma County still ranks as the nation's fifth-least affordable metropolitan area to buy a house, according to a study released Thursday by a housing advocacy group.

The study, by Moody's Economy.com for the group Homes for Working Families, examined affordability in 40 communities. Ten of the 20 least affordable are in California; only San Francisco, Los Angeles, Orange County and San Jose are less affordable than Santa Rosa.

The analysis centered on whether a household earning an area's median income could purchase a typical home spending 28 percent of their income.

The affordability gap widened dramatically during the housing boom, as home prices rose much faster than incomes. While home prices tripled in Sonoma County from 1996 to 2005, the average resident's income grew just 46 percent during the same period, according to the Center for Regional Economic Analysis at Sonoma State University.