

Local rents among worst in the nation

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WATSONVILLE — Findings from a new study prove what many residents have complained about for years: Affordable housing is hard to find.

In the report, titled "Out of Reach: Rental Housing at What Cost?," the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) found that 47 percent of renters in Santa Cruz and Watsonville are unable to

afford a two-bedroom apartment.

It also said the average person would have to make 368 percent of the minimum wage — or have a 147-hour work week at minimum wage — to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

Those figures make Santa Cruz and Watsonville the 11th most unaffordable place in the country to live.

Elisabeth Vogel, a housing developer for Mercy Charities Housing

California in its Santa Cruz office, says the study's findings should be an indicator of the need for affordable housing in Santa Cruz County, though the probability of providing enough is slight.

"As much affordable housing as possible needs to be encouraged, ...but building a few units here and there isn't going to make a big difference," Vogel said.

"It's not getting any better," she said, "(but) that doesn't mean we

should give up."

According to the report, the most unaffordable place to live was the Brownsville-Harlingen, Tex. area, where 55 percent of the renters cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment. Others ranked lower than Santa Cruz County are Miami, Fla.; Westchester County, New York; and the Santa Barbara-Santa Maria area.

Jane Graf, president of Mercy Charities Housing California, said

Santa Cruz County's vicinity to San Jose and the Silicon Valley should have brought some affordability to the area.

"The affordable housing problem in Santa Cruz is a crisis," she said in a press release. "It's a national disgrace to think that while surrounded by the wealth of Silicon Valley, working families and needy elders have no place to live."

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In its report, the coalition identified a lack of affordable housing as a nationwide problem, stating that there is a need for more federal housing resources.

"Out of Reach reminds us that an important part of the solution to the nation's housing problems is to make available more affordable rental housing," said Bill Faith, NLIHC interim president, in a press release. "The federal government needs to substantially increase resources for affordable housing in

order to fill the gap."

The major conclusion of the study is that fair market rents are unaffordable for a large number of renters, including many working families. According to the study, at least one-third of renters across the nation cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment, and from the majority of metropolitan areas and counties across the U.S., one out of every three renters could not afford a one-bedroom apartment.

It also cited findings that in every state, metro area and county, renters needed more than one full-time, minimum-wage job to afford the fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment.