

1.75x Rent Gap in Asheville's Counties — ALEX Intelligence 2026

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Buncombe vs. Madison — A Structural Divide in Housing Affordability

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THE DATA

1.75x

Ratio of Highest to Lowest County Median Rent in the Market (2024)

The gap between Buncombe County's \$1,362 median rent and Madison County's \$780 is the widest within the Asheville market.

This 1.75x disparity is not a temporary fluctuation — it reflects a deep structural divide in housing value, development density, and economic opportunity across the region. Buncombe County, home to Asheville's urban core, continues to outpace surrounding counties in rental pricing due to higher demand, limited supply, and concentrated amenities. Meanwhile, Madison County's lower rents signal a different economic trajectory, one still shaped by rural character and slower growth.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2024 • ALEX Intelligence computation
<https://alex-companies.com/data/2026-09-10-asheville-within-county-gross-rent>



01

Affordability is a County-Level Reality

The 1.75x rent gap means that a family earning median income in Madison County could face a 44% higher housing cost burden in Buncombe County — even without moving. This isn't just about moving; it's about where opportunity is accessible. For remote workers and new residents, choosing between Buncombe and Madison is a decision not just about lifestyle, but about economic survival. The data reveals that 'Asheville' as a market is not a single housing ecosystem, but a patchwork of distinct affordability zones.



02

Policy Must Match Geography

Asheville's new 'No Rent for Slumlords' ordinance, passed September 9, 2026, applies citywide — but enforcement will be most challenging in high-rent, high-density Buncombe County, where inspection capacity is strained. Meanwhile, Madison County's lower rental turnover and fewer units may make compliance easier. The policy's effectiveness will vary not by intent, but by geography. This underscores that housing regulation must be tailored to local conditions, not applied uniformly across a region with such divergent rent levels.

Real Estate Strategy & Intelligence Leader. Democratized Blue Ocean Strategist & Operator.

Diane Hart Alexander, MBA, MHA

Chair & CEO, ALEX Companies

Designated Broker, Alexander Tiffany Southwest, LLC dba ALEX.realestate, et.al.

Texas License #574877-B · Broker License #565194-BB

diane@alex.realestate · +1 713.591.9902



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