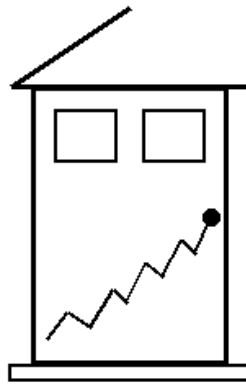


Comparing Rent Vs Income Growth in Erie County

Buffalo Rent Cooperative

By

Will Knauss



INTRODUCTION

Currently, affordability and cost of living are two of the most discussed topics in the U.S., with the heightened cost of living, driven in part by high housing costs, posing extreme stress on low-income families struggling to keep up. Although income typically increases on an annual basis, over the past 3 years, rental amounts have increased disproportionately, thus fueling low affordability in our communities.

MATERIALS

By utilizing localized income information provided by the yearly census data and Zillow's observed rent index data, discrepancies in rent and income growth between Erie County and the United States can be compared.

PROCEDURE

1. Rental Data was sourced from Zillow Research using the ZORI Data type and filtered by geographic region.
 - a. Limitation: Data only dates back to 2015
2. Income Data was sourced from the Census Bureau, filtering by region, year, and topic (Income and Poverty).
 - a. Limitation: Data for 2025 and 2026 are not yet available

DATA:

Year	Buffalo RENT	Erie County RENT	United States RENT	Median Income(Erie County	Mean Income(Erie County	Median Income U.S.	Mean Income U.S.
2015	\$763.10	\$808.44	\$1,136.75	52214	69529	55775	78378
2016	\$798.88	\$844.69	\$1,191.41	54246	73544	57617	81346
2017	\$825.73	\$873.62	\$1,233.01	55604	74591	60336	84525
2018	\$873.24	\$921.32	\$1,287.13	56369	76265	61937	87864
2019	\$905.25	\$953.99	\$1,341.00	60652	79972	65712	92324
2020	\$930.95	\$979.18	\$1,394.87	59464	80595	64994	91547
2021	\$994.91	\$1,043.76	\$1,423.07	63035	83120	69717	97962
2022	\$1,101.92	\$1,156.16	\$1,642.38	70044	93811	74755	105555
2023	\$1,195.58	\$1,246.92	\$1,749.40	70492	93267	77719	109160
2024	\$1,249.10	\$1,304.86	\$1,802.13	73011	97967	81604	114296
2025	\$1,306.10	\$1,362.70	\$1,855.92	NA	NA	NA	NA
2026	\$1,344.15	\$1,402.75	\$1,892.44	NA	NA	NA	NA

Rental Values are based on the Jan 1st data points for each year.

RESULTS

Table 1

Rental Statistics (2015-2024)	Buffalo	Erie County	United States
Mean	\$963.87	\$1,013.29	\$1,420.11
Median	\$918.10	\$966.58	\$1,367.94
Min	\$763.10	\$808.44	\$1,136.75
Max	\$1,249.10	\$1,304.86	\$1,802.13
Std Dev	\$168.13	\$171.26	\$234.75
Total \$ Increase (2015→2024)	\$486.01	\$496.41	\$665.38
Total % Increase	63.70%	61.40%	58.50%
Compound Annual Growth Rate (9 yr)	5.63%	5.46%	5.25%
Avg Annual YoY %	5.66%	5.49%	5.32%
Correlation Erie vs US / Buffalo vs US	0.9968	0.9966	
Erie / Buffalo discount vs U.S. avg	-28.65%	-32.13%	

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on the growth of rental statistics between Buffalo, Erie County, and the United States. This table indicates that rent in Buffalo, although lower than in the United States, has increased slightly faster since 2015.

Table 2:

Income Comparison: Mean vs Median (Erie County, 2015-2024)				
Metric	Median Income	Mean Income	US Median Income	US Mean Income
Average	\$61,513	\$82,266	\$67,017	\$94,296
Min	\$52,214	\$69,529	\$55,775	\$78,378
Max	\$73,011	\$97,967	\$81,604	\$114,296
Std Dev	\$7,405	\$9,677	\$8,727	\$12,159
Total \$ Increase (2015→2024)	\$20,797	\$28,438	\$25,829	\$35,918
Total % Increase	39.80%	40.90%	46.30%	45.80%
CAGR (9 yr)	3.80%	3.88%	4.32%	4.28%
Median/Mean ratio (avg)	0.75			
Correlation (Mean vs Median)	0.9963			
Rent-to-Income (avg monthly rent / monthly median income)	19.80%	18.80%	25.40%	

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics on income growth in Erie County and the US. The table indicates that income growth in the United States has outpaced Erie County by around 5-6%. However, although income growth is lower in Erie County, when comparing average monthly rent to the monthly median income, Erie County is more affordable than the U.S. median.

Table 3

Rent vs Income: The Affordability Gap (2015→2024) — Erie County & U.S.

Metric	Erie Rent	Erie Median Inc	Erie Mean Inc	US Rent	US Median Inc	US Mean Inc
Total % Increase	61.40%	39.80%	40.90%	58.50%	46.30%	45.80%
CAGR (9-yr)	5.46%	3.80%	3.88%	5.25%	4.32%	4.28%
Gap Analysis (rent growth - income growth)						
Gap Analysis	Erie	U.S.				
Rent grew faster than Median Income by:	21.60%	12.20%				
Rent grew faster than Mean Income by:	20.50%	12.70%				
Rent growth as multiple of Median Income growth:	1.54x	1.26x				
Rent-to-Income Burden (annual rent / median income)	Erie	U.S.				
2015 burden	18.60%	24.50%				
2024 burden	21.40%	26.50%				
Change in burden (pp)	2.90%	2%				
Dollar Comparison (annual)	Erie	U.S.				
Annual rent increase 2015→2024	\$5,957	\$7,985				
Median income increase 2015→2024	\$20,797	\$25,829				
Income gain absorbed by rent increase	28.60%	30.90%				

Table 3 compares the growth of rent vs income in Erie County and the United States. This table indicates that without adjusting for inflation rental amount has exceeded income growth by more than 20% in Erie County in comparison to the 12.2% across the United States.

Table 4

Inflation Assumption 2.50%

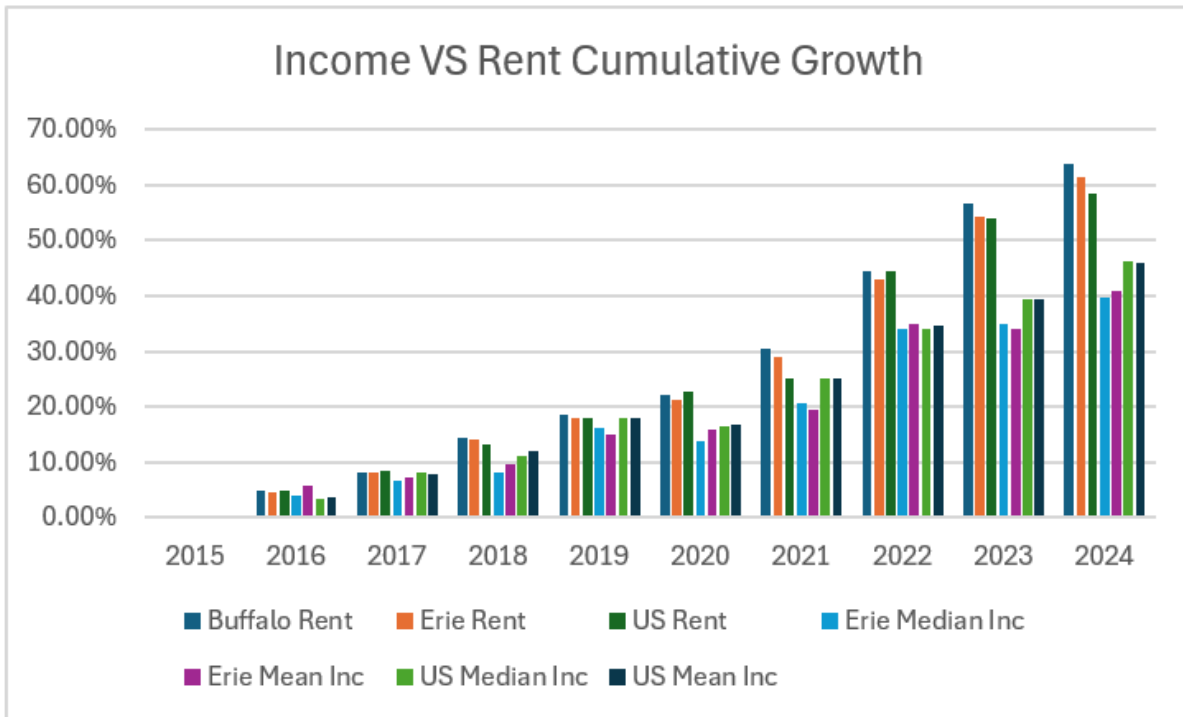
Real (Inflation-Adjusted) Growth, 2015→2024 — base year 2015

Series	Nominal % Growth	Cumulative Inflation	Real % Growth	Real CAGR
Buffalo Rent	63.70%	24.90%	31.10%	3.05%
Erie Rent	61.40%	24.90%	29.20%	2.89%
U.S. Rent	58.50%	24.90%	26.90%	2.69%
Erie Median Income	39.80%	24.90%	12.00%	1.26%
Erie Mean Income	40.90%	24.90%	12.80%	1.35%
U.S. Median Income	46.30%	24.90%	17.20%	1.77%
U.S. Mean Income	45.80%	24.90%	16.80%	1.74%

Real Affordability Gap (rent - income, in real terms)	
Erie: Real rent growth - Real median income growth	≈17%
Erie: Real rent growth - Real mean income growth	≈16%
U.S.: Real rent growth - Real median income growth	≈10%
U.S.: Real rent growth - Real mean income growth	≈10%

Table 4 shows the inflation-adjusted % growth of Rent and Income. This table indicates that although rent has exceeded income, the true amount is lower than shown in Table 3. Furthermore, it shows the real affordability gap, as in Erie county rent growth has outpaced income growth by around 17 percent in comparison to around 10 percent across the United States.

Graph 1



Graph 1 visualizes the cumulative percent growth in each of the 7 categories. As visualized, the heightened compound annual growth rate of rent has led to a higher total percent growth over the past 9 years.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 9 years, rent in Erie County has grown faster than income, creating an affordability gap that disproportionately impacts low-income renters. While rent in Erie County remains lower than the national average on a surface level, the inflation-adjusted analysis reveals that real rent growth has outpaced real income growth by approximately 17 percent locally, compared to 10 percent nationally. This means that Buffalo renters are losing ground faster than their counterparts across the country.

For low-income households, this means deciding between rent, food, healthcare, and quality of life. For families already struggling to pay the rent each month, if this trend continues, long-term economic mobility becomes increasingly difficult, and steps to success, such as education, become increasingly unstable. Addressing this gap requires

policy solutions that operate at the systems level. Expanding rental assistance programs, increasing the supply of income-restricted affordable housing, and strengthening tenant protections are all potential steps local and state policymakers can take to address these challenges.

REFERENCES

1. Zillow Research. (2024). *Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI)*. Zillow, Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>
2. U.S. Census Bureau. (2015–2024). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates: Income and Poverty in the United States*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov>