



AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS INDEX

MCLEAN COUNTY, IL

JULY 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

McLean County is facing a housing crisis. While there have been various efforts to quantify this problem, there has been a gap in terms of where and who needs affordable housing more within the county. This White Paper addresses that gap through an “Affordable Housing Needs Index” by identifying census tracts with higher need for affordable housing.

The Affordable Housing Needs Index is created using seven variables – race, age, household income, educational attainment, housing tenure, nativity, and cost burden. Each census tract was given a score based on how closely it reflects the demography of the respondents from the previous CDBG resident survey. After scoring each variable, a weighted score was calculated to create a final score from a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 meaning the highest need for affordable housing.

Findings show that the census tracts with the highest need for affordable housing are concentrated within the Bloomington-Normal urban area, particularly a number of census tracts in Bloomington along the US 51 Corridor. These tracts consistently scored high based on variables, specifically race, household income, cost burden, age, and education.

While the findings highlight a number of census tracts, the Affordable Housing Needs Index does not imply that the other parts of the county do not need affordable housing, only that certain tracts experience disproportionately higher challenges.

Limitations of the research include not utilizing other demographic variables such as marital status, unemployment, disability, etc. It did not take into consideration proximity to services such as public transportation, schools, healthcare, etc. as well. Future iterations of this research can explore these to provide a more comprehensive look at the county's housing needs.

INTRODUCTION

It has been established that McLean County, IL is experiencing a housing affordability crisis. The **Regional Housing Recovery Plan**¹ shows that problems such as limited housing affordability, limited housing diversity, barriers to access, competitive markets, and public concerns have created challenges for residents of the county, making it difficult to secure safe and affordable housing. The **Bloomington-Normal Rental Rate Analysis White Paper**² also adds that between 2018 and 2023, rental rates increased by 40%, which lead to 44% of renters to be cost-burdened.

As part of the City of Bloomington's and Town of Normal's 2025-2029 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Consolidated Plans, a CDBG Resident Survey was conducted to assess the community's affordable housing experience. Certain population groups reported being unable to find safe and affordable housing at higher rates than others. These groups include African Americans, adults aged 25-34, households making less than \$50,000 annually, individuals with a high school diploma or less, and renters.

While the Regional Housing Recovery Plan quantifies the demography of those in need of affordable housing, it does not show where these people reside within the county. On the other hand, while the Consolidated Plans show maps of residents by race, these maps do not directly indicate which areas experience the greatest need for affordable housing.

This White Paper aims to bridge the gap by using census data of seven key factors to develop a score, identifying who is most in need and where those needs are concentrated. Knowing this will help policymakers and advocates to better utilize resources and promote programs with greater focus and equity, especially in contexts where funding is limited.

METHODOLOGY

The variables used to create the “Affordable Housing Needs Index” was determined by the population groups gathered from the Resident Survey. These include race, age, household income, educational attainment, and housing tenure. In addition to these, two other variables were added, specifically cost burden and nativity (referring to a person’s place of birth). The literature shows that immigrants often face higher housing costs, making nativity another important variable³. Cost burden is also an important factor that stands on its own. As explained in another research article, cost burden is correlated to those who rent and those who have lower incomes, but not all of those who rent or have lower median income are experiencing cost burden⁴.

The data used to create the Affordable Housing Needs Index was gathered using the 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates⁵. To score each variable, the author identified the two most common population groups in each census tract. If the most common group matches the group identified in the CDBG resident survey, it receives a score of 5. If it matches the second-most common group, it receives a 3. All other responses receive a 1. A higher score indicates a higher need for affordable housing.

Table 1. Scoring Based on Most Prevalent Population Group within the Census Tract

Variable	Score = 5	Score = 3	Score = 1
Race	African American	White	Any Other
Annual Household Income	Less than \$50,000	Less than \$109,400	Greater than \$109,400
Cost-burden	>= 30% of income on rent	<= 25% of income on rent	Any Other
Age	25 to 34	35 to 44	Any Other
Educational Attainment	High School or Below	Some College/Associate's Degree	Bachelor's or Higher
Housing Tenure	Renter	Owner	N/A
Nativity	Born in Asia	Born in Latin America	Any Other

As McLean County is predominantly White, they made up the largest share of responses. To balance this, the author determined whether the census tract had a higher number of African Americans within the census tract as compared to the county average. If it did, it received a score of 5. If the census tract had a higher-than-average number of White population but not of African American population, then it received a score of 3. Any other population group received a score of 1. The scoring principle for the variables Age, Household Income, Educational Attainment, and Housing Tenure were all also based on the responses from the resident survey.

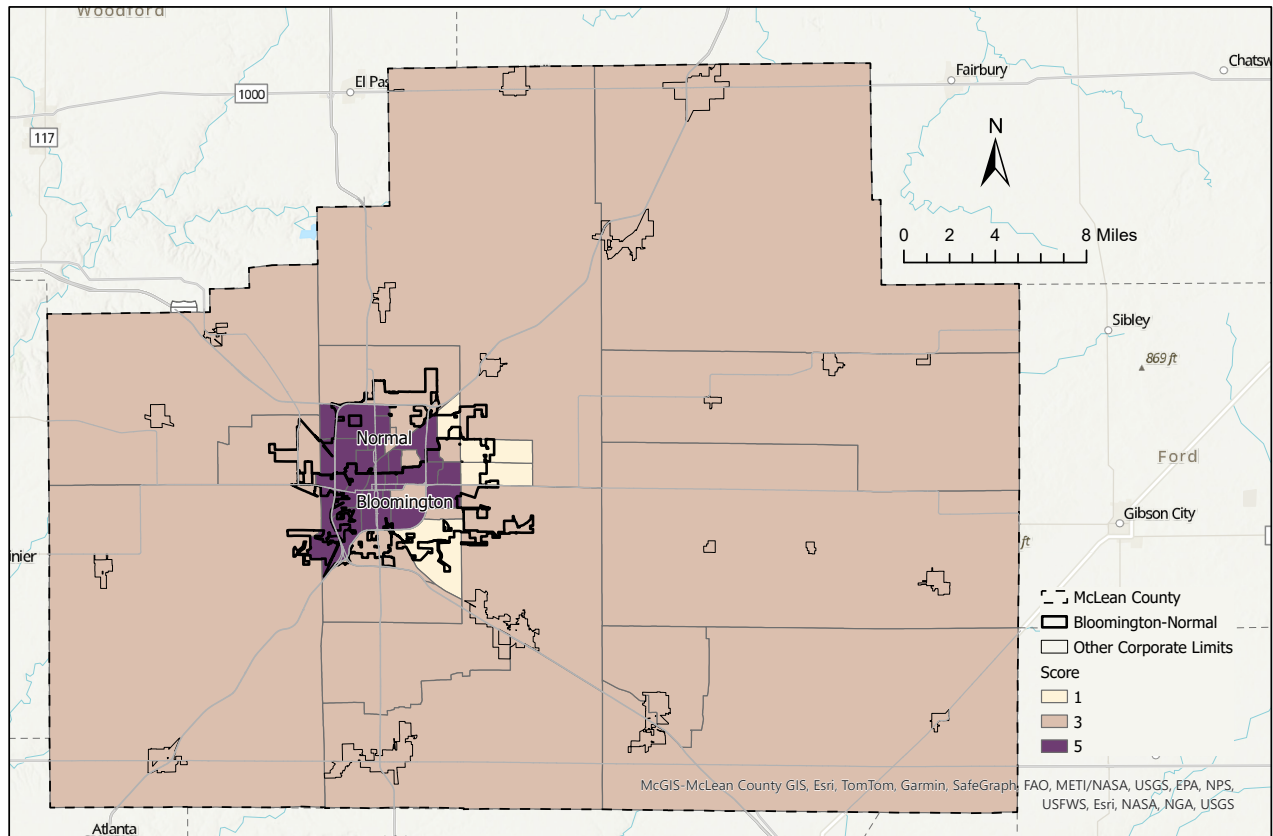
As seen in Table 1, \$109,400 was used as a benchmark for Annual Household Income given that it was the Area Median Income in McLean County⁶ at the time of writing this paper. In terms of cost burden, according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), households are considered cost-burdened if they spend more than 30% of their income on rent and other housing costs⁷. Therefore, if the majority of the census tract is cost-burdened, it receives a score of 5. As for nativity, according to the US Census Bureau, 7.7% of McLean County population is foreign-born⁸. Among the foreign-born population, most of them are born in Asia, followed by those born in Latin America. If the majority of the foreign-born population are from Asia or Latin America, the tract receives a score of 5 or 3 respectively. Otherwise, it receives a 1.

In order to create the final weighted score, the variables were each assigned weights based on how often the specific variable was used in other related literature. Race had the most weight, followed by Household Income, Cost Burden, Age, Education, Housing Tenure, and Nativity. The initial scores that they received were then multiplied with their assigned weights to create a final score ranging from 1 to 5 with 1 meaning lowest need for affordable housing and 5 as highest need for affordable housing.

RESULTS

A. RACE

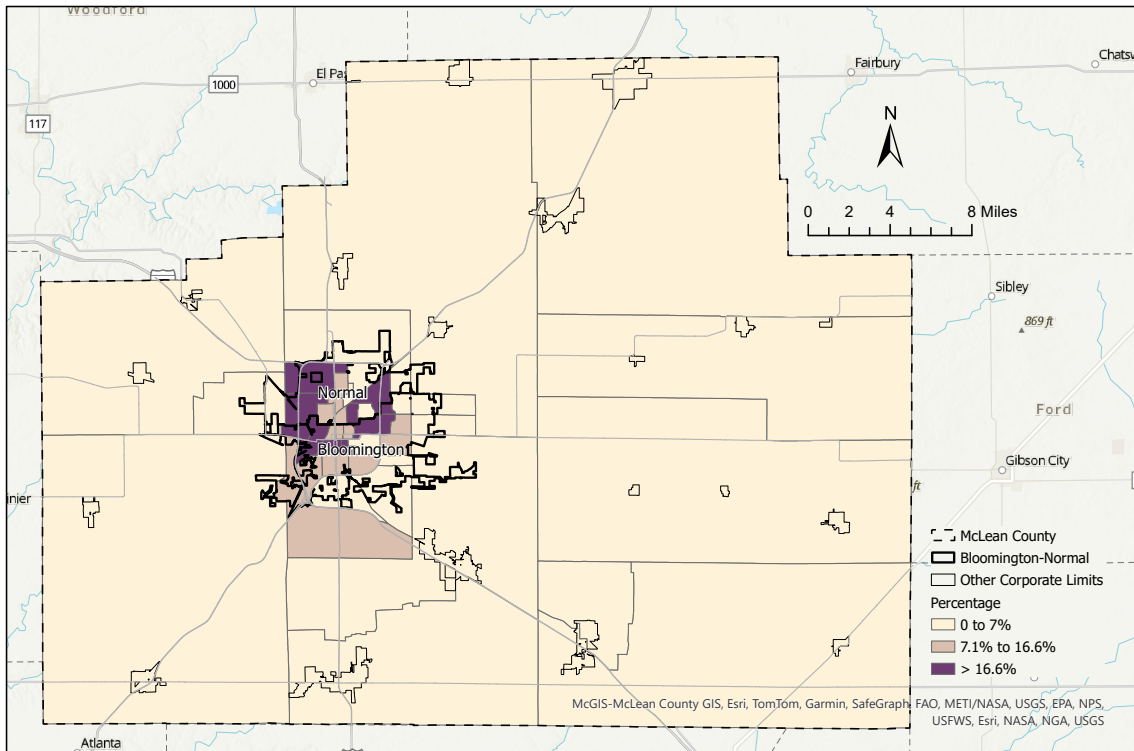
Map 1. Affordable Housing Needs Score based on Race



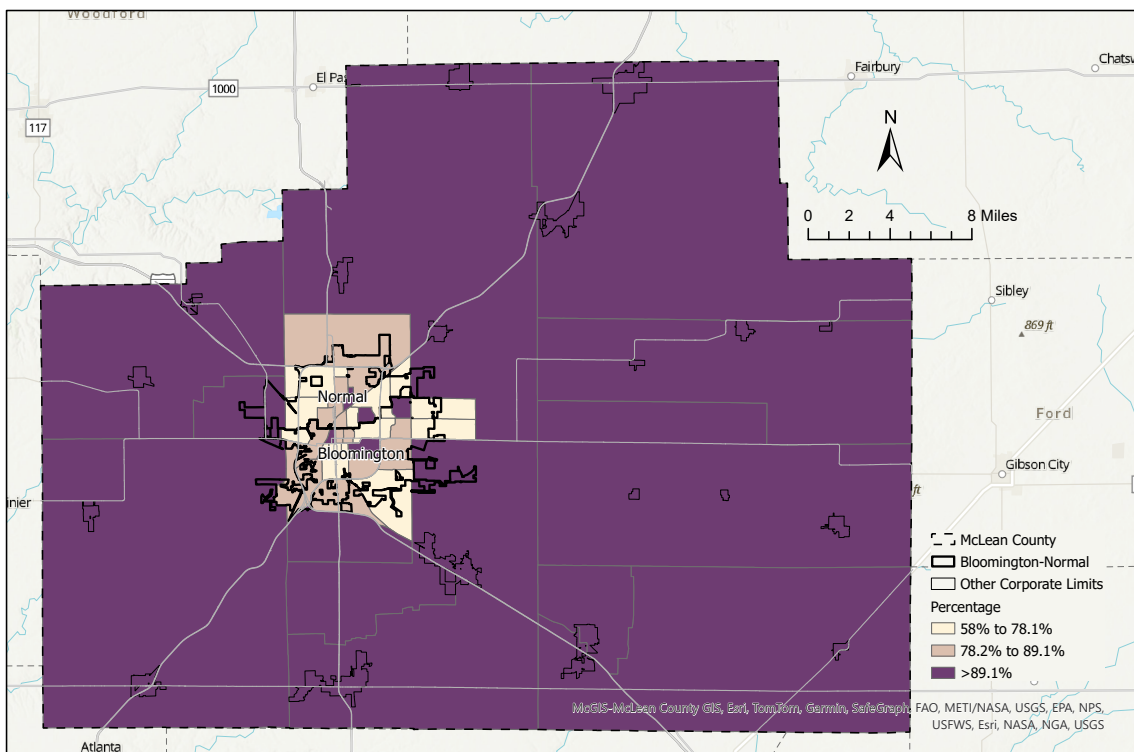
Map 1 shows that the majority of Bloomington-Normal received a score of 5 for the variable “Race”. Outside the Bloomington-Normal region, the rest of the county received a score of 3. Only four census tracts received a score of 1.

For reference, Map 2 shows the percentage of the African American population relative to the total population within the census tract. Map 3 shows the same concept for the White population. Map 2 shows that a high concentration of the African American population reside in the east and west side of Normal and the northeast and northwest side of Bloomington. Conversely, Map 3 shows higher concentrations of the White population residing outside the Bloomington-Normal area. This explains the concentration of high scores in terms of Race for the Bloomington-Normal area.

Map 2. Percentage of African American Population by Census Tract

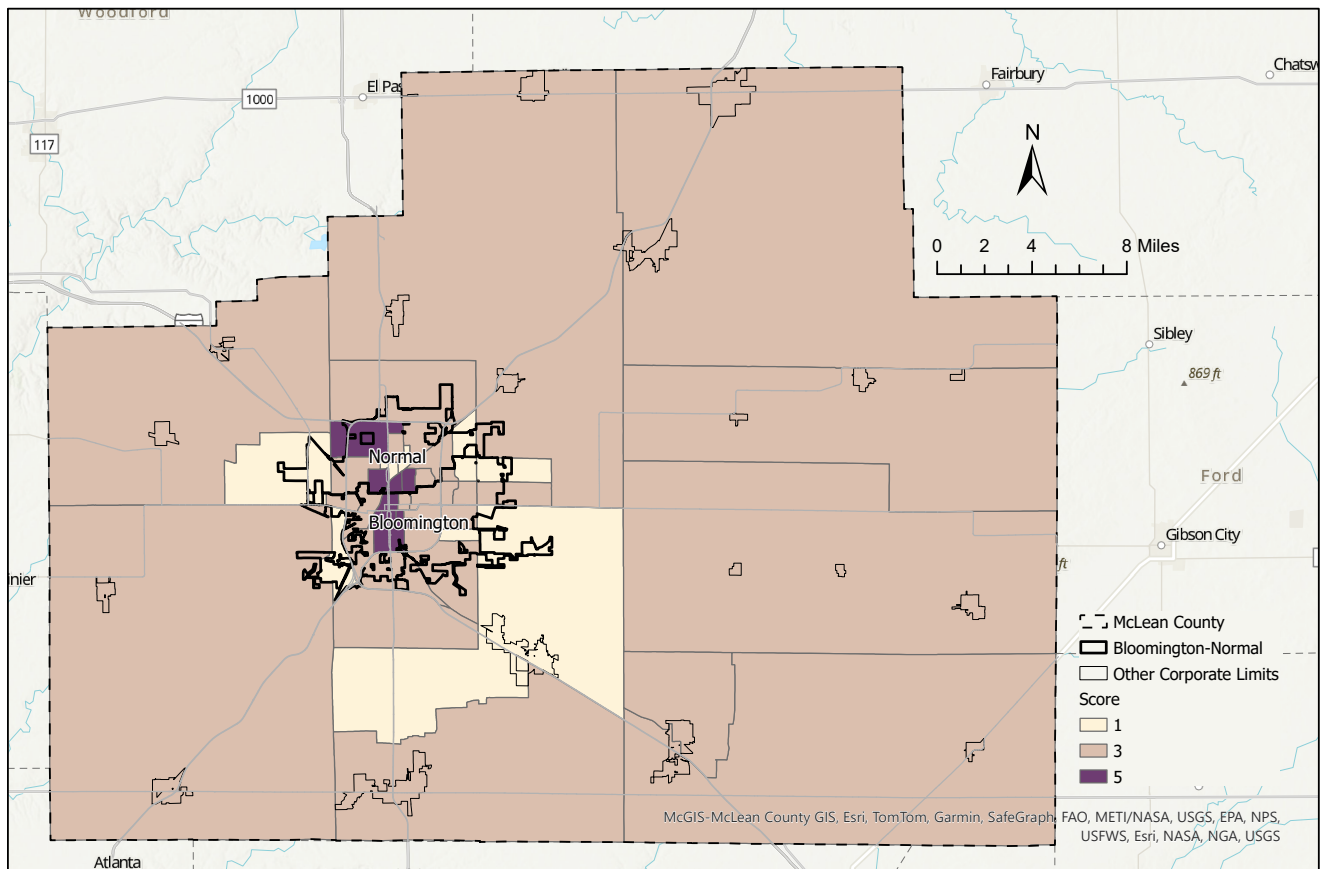


Map 3. Percentage of White Population by Census Tract



B. ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

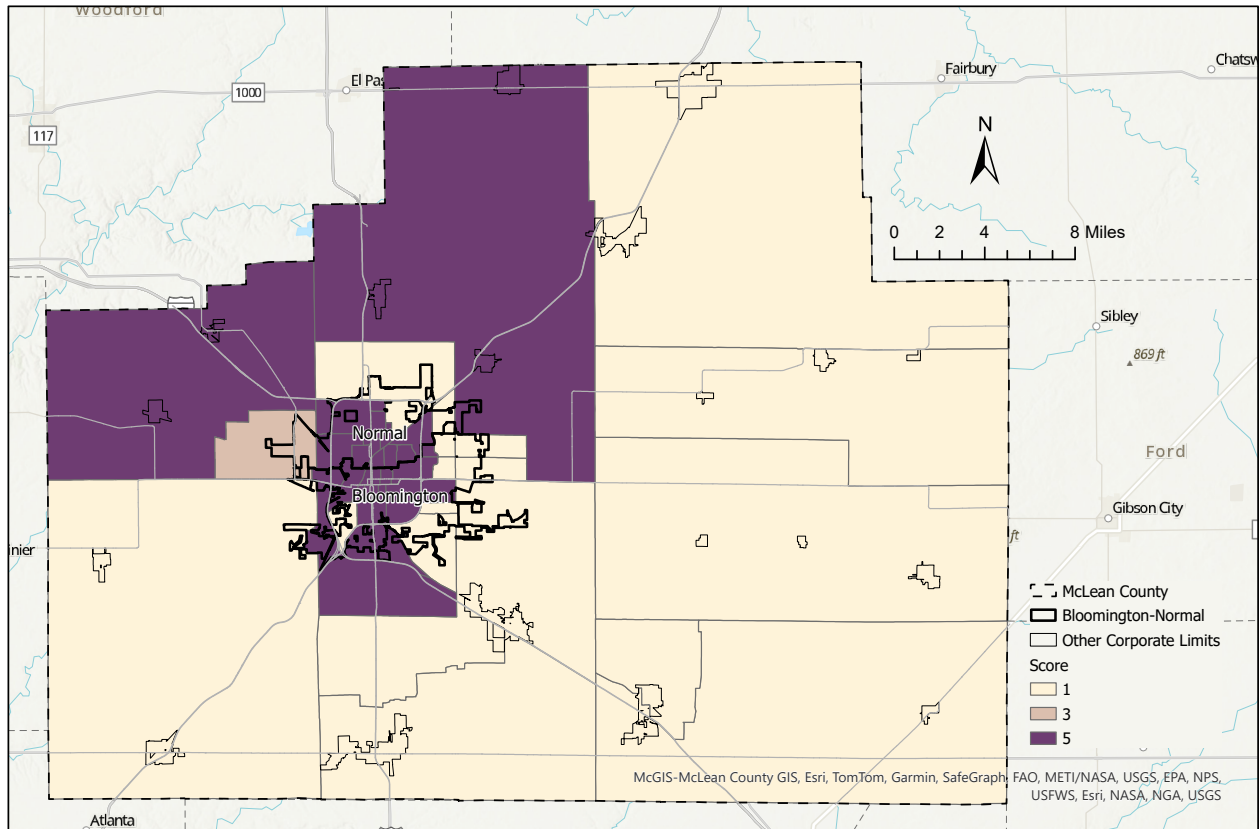
Map 4. Affordable Housing Needs Score based on Annual Household Income



Map 4 shows a concentration of lower income households (households earning less than \$50,000 annually) along Main Street cutting through the City and the Town, with another census tract on the north side of the Town. Most of the census tracts within the county got a score of 3, which says that a higher amount of the population living in the county earn less than the Area Median Income. Only a small number of census tracts, located near the Bloomington-Normal area, received a score of 1.

C. COST BURDEN

Map 5. Affordable Housing Needs Score based on Cost Burden

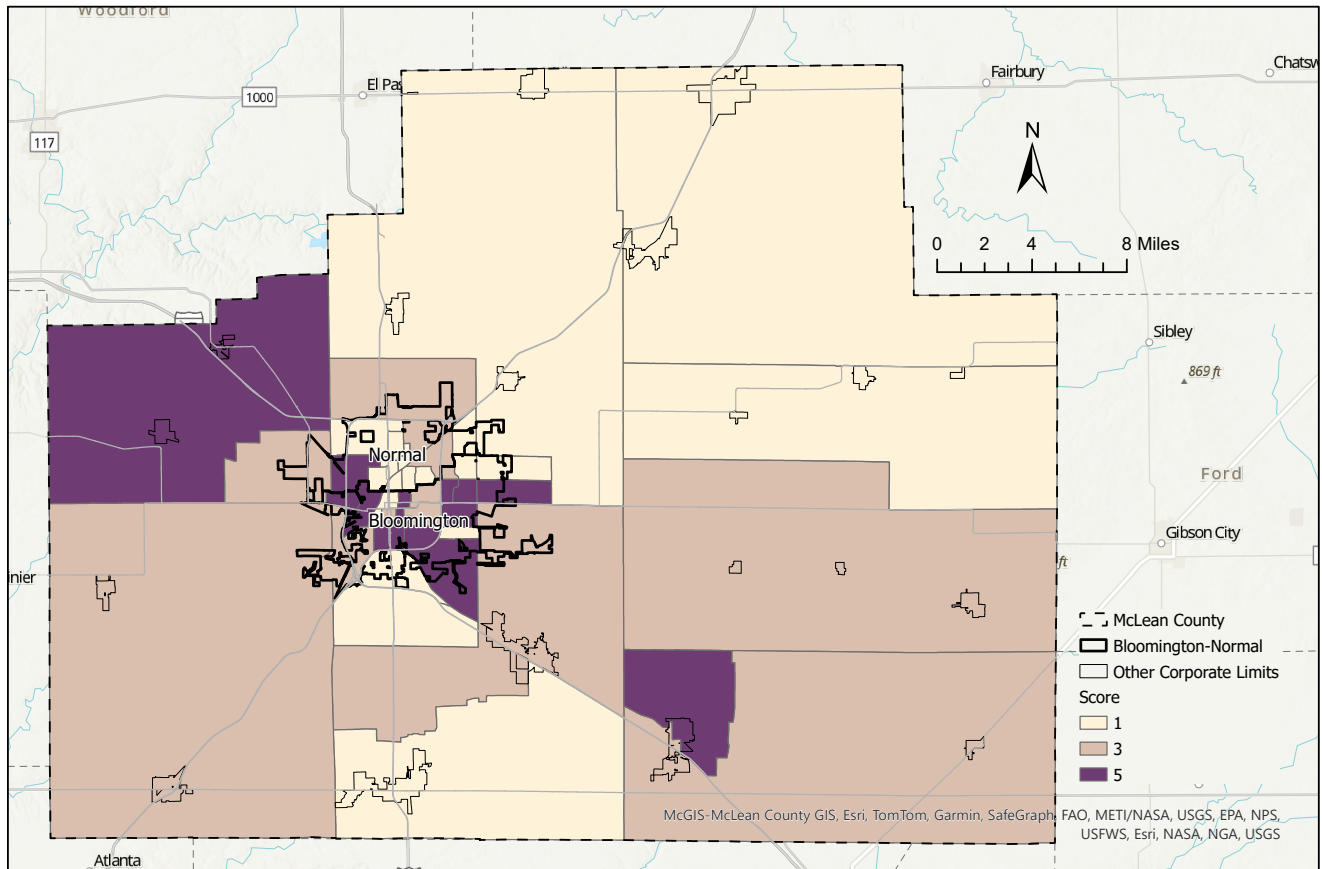


Map 5 shows that most of the census tracts within the Bloomington-Normal area experience cost burden. In addition, census tracts just south of Bloomington, as well as the north and northwest census tracts of the county also experience higher rates of cost burden. Except for one census tract west of Normal, the rest of the county received a score of 1 in terms of cost burden.

One possible explanation for the high scores in the census tracts north of Normal is that they include some parts of the Town with higher cost burdens, which raise the overall score for the entire tract. Another explanation, particularly for CT 52.02 (northwest of Normal), is that the Danvers area has a high concentration of residents spending more than 35% or more of their income on rent, which also drives up the tract's score.

D. AGE

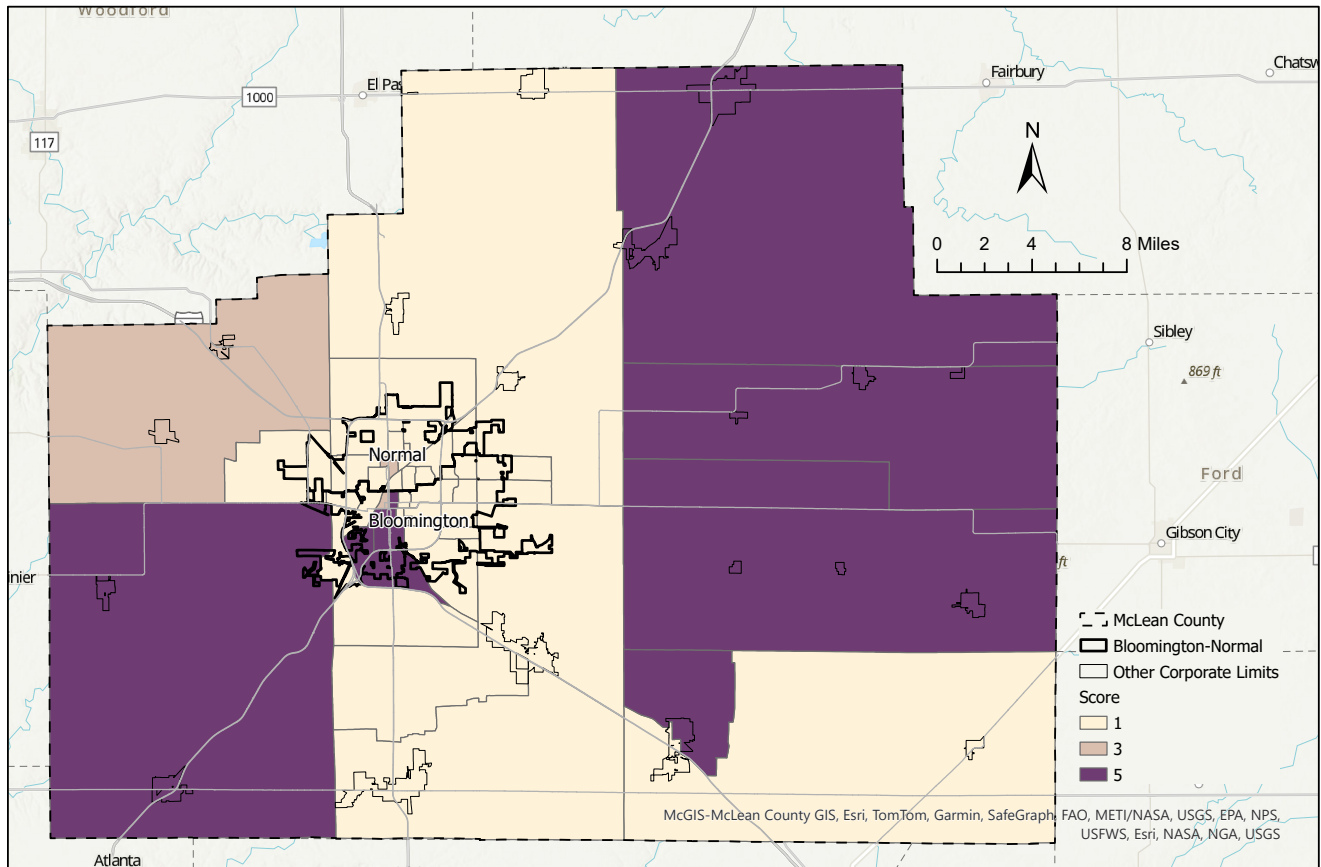
Map 6. Affordable Housing Needs Score based on Age



Map 6 shows that higher concentrations of people ages 25 to 34 are located in Bloomington. Other areas that have high concentrations of 25- to 34-year-old people include west of Normal, north of LeRoy, and the northwest area of the county. The southern half of the county received a score of 3, signifying a higher concentration of people ages 35 to 44 instead. The rest of the county received a score of 1.

E. EDUCATION

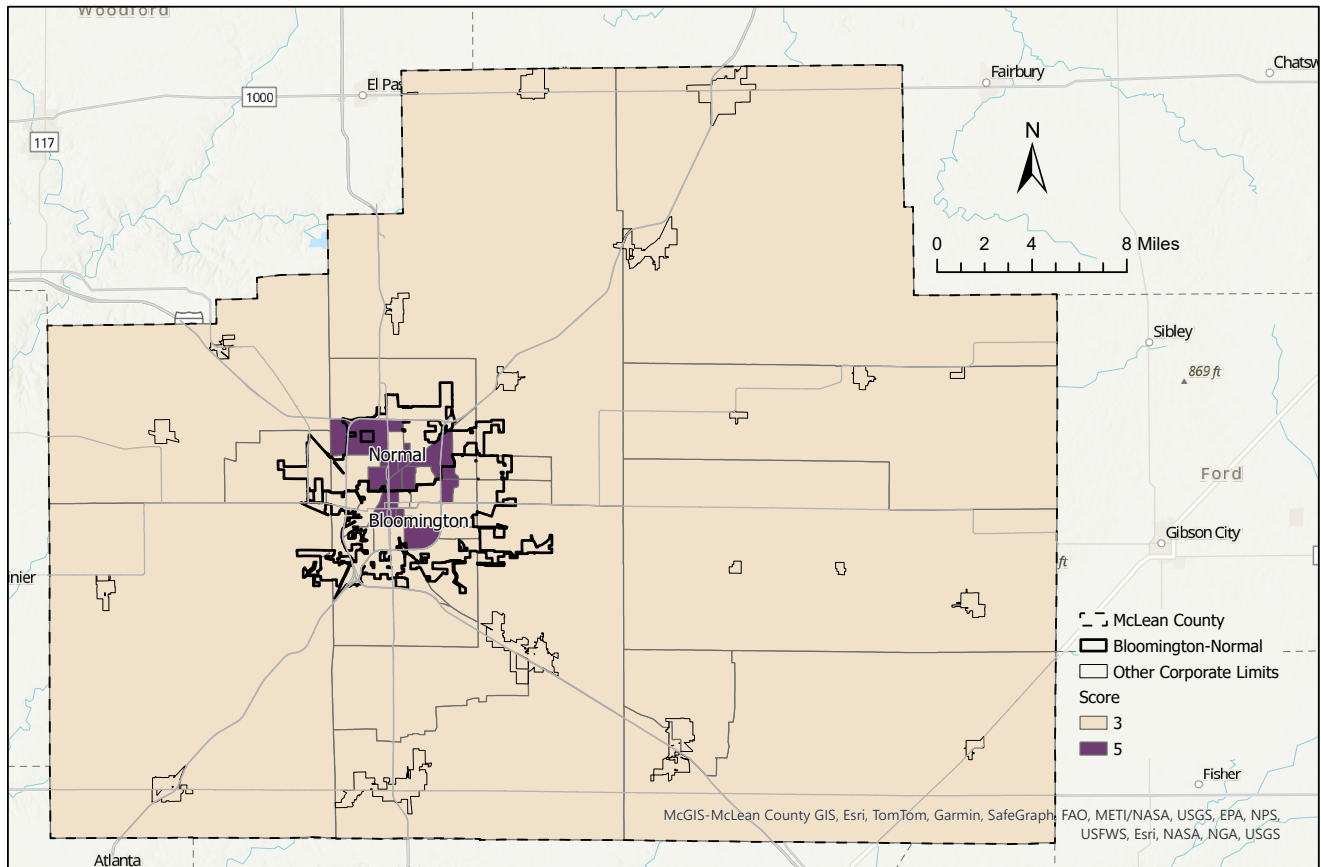
Map 7. Affordable Housing Needs Score based on Educational Attainment



Map 7 shows that the south and central census tracts of Bloomington, along with the southwest area and east side of McLean County received a score of 5 in terms of educational attainment, signifying a higher concentration of people with a high school diploma or less. Aside from a number of census tracts, the rest of the county received a score of 1, saying that these census tracts have higher numbers of people with a college education and beyond.

F. HOUSING TENURE

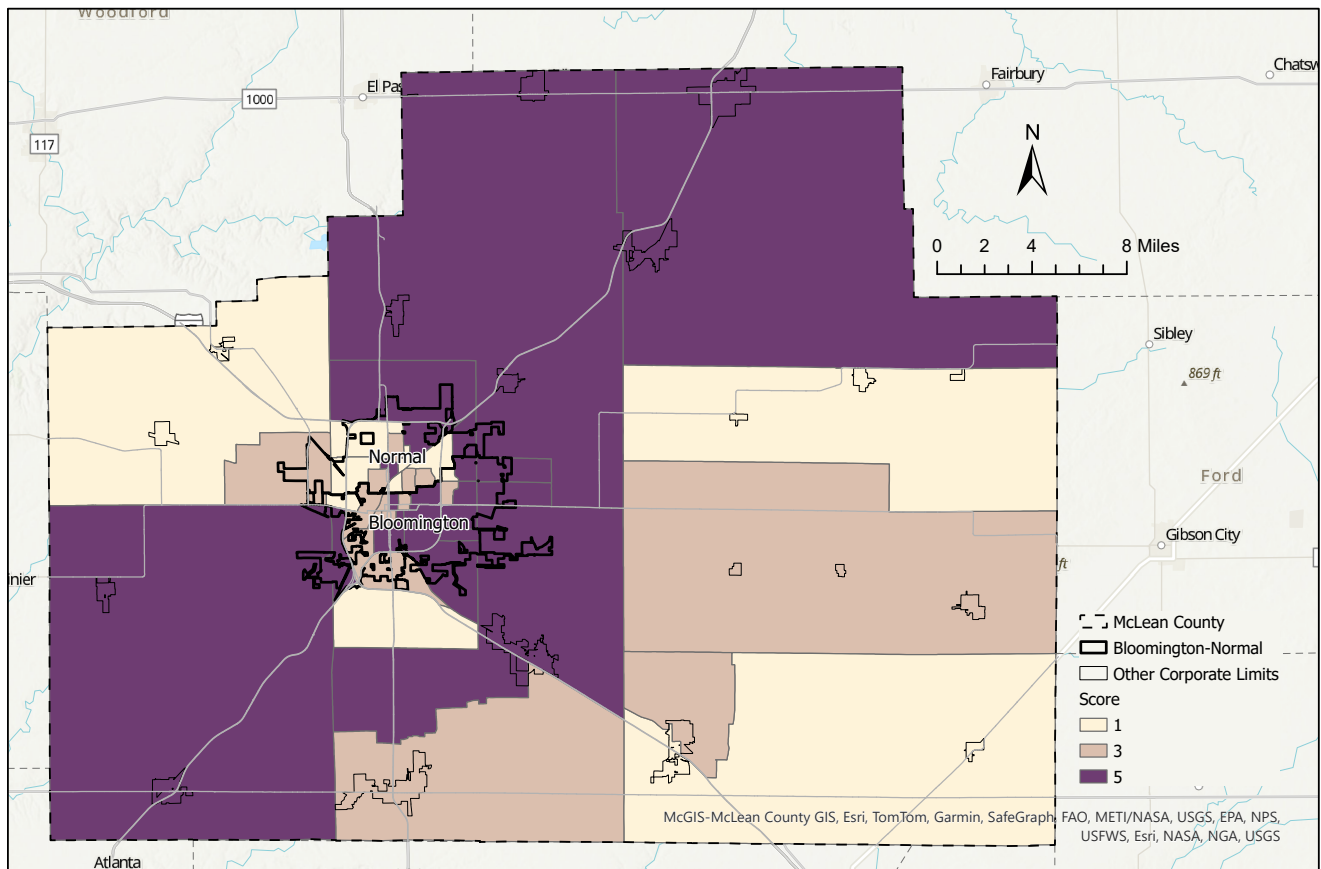
Map 8. Affordable Housing Needs Score based on Housing Tenure



Unlike the other maps, Map 8 only has two scores – 3 if the majority of the housing units within the census tract is owner-occupied and 5 if the majority is renter-occupied. Census tracts that have a higher concentration of renter-occupied units are all within the Bloomington-Normal area. The rest of the county is mainly owner-occupied.

G. NATIVITY

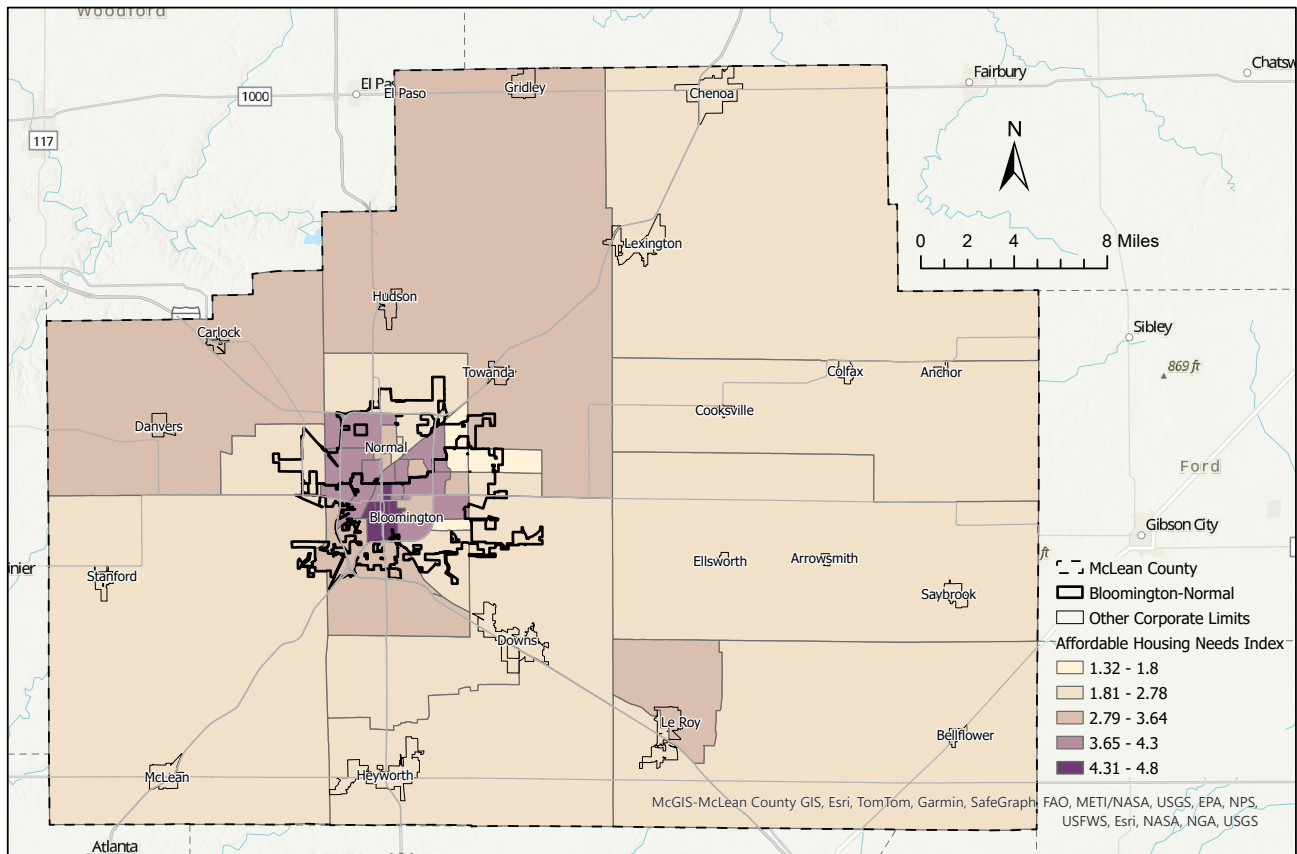
Map 9. Affordable Housing Needs Score based on Nativity



Map 9 quantifies the census tracts based on which foreign-born group is most prevalent per census tract. As shown above, northeast census tracts in Normal, east and southeast census tracts in Bloomington, along with southwest and northern areas within the county received a score of 5, signifying a higher concentration of Asian-born populations there. The south side, around Heyworth, and east side of the county, plus a number of census tracts within Bloomington-Normal received a score of 3, showing a higher of Latin American-born population instead.

H. AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS INDEX

Map 10. Affordable Housing Needs Index Map
McLean County, IL

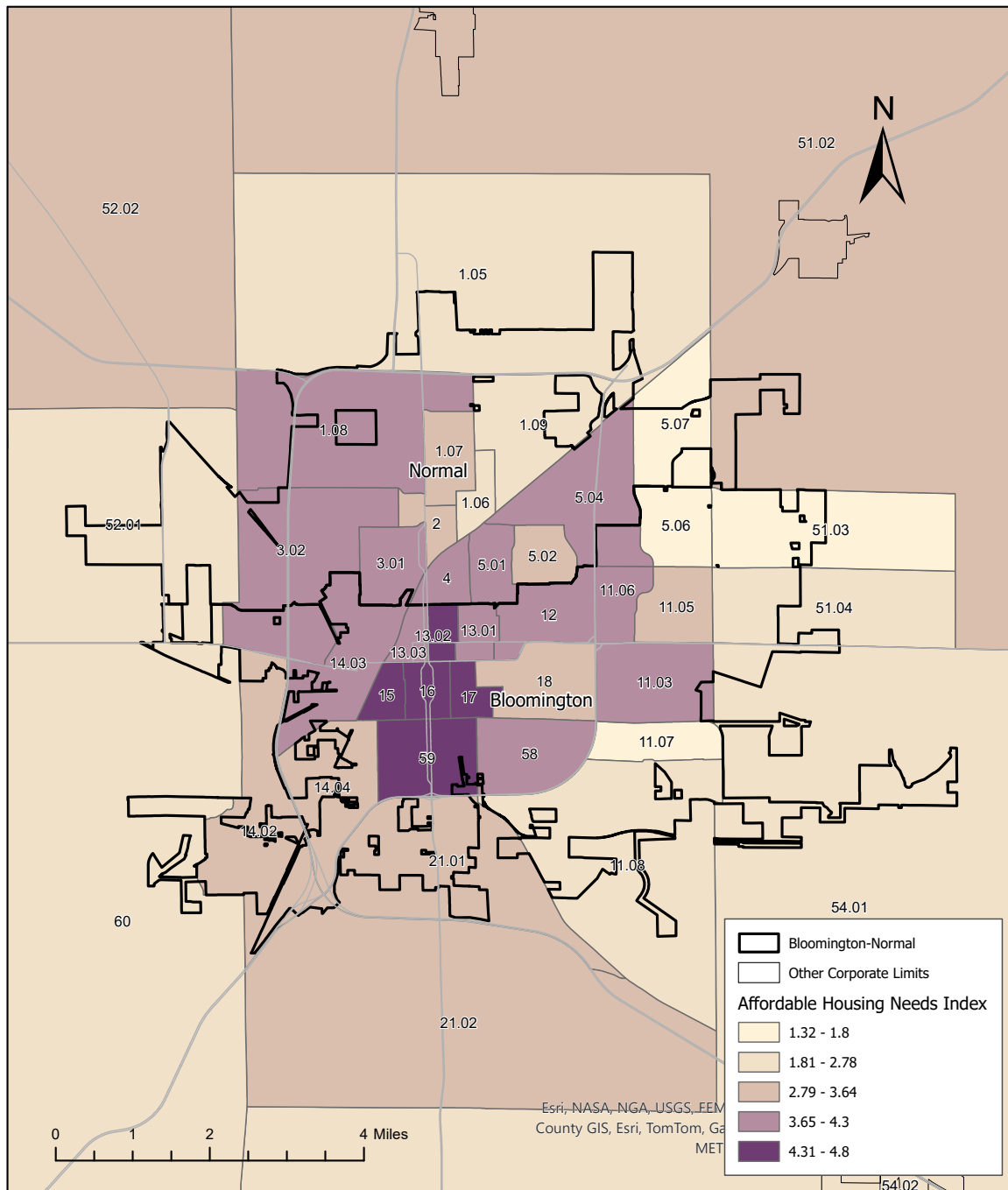


After scoring each variable, these are then given weights and synthesized into one score which this white paper calls the “Affordable Housing Needs Index”. Based on the analysis, the census tracts that scored the highest (4.31 to 4.8) are the census tracts in Bloomington, along the US 51 Business/Main Street corridor. Other census tracts within Bloomington-Normal received a score of 3.65 to 4.3. What Map 10 shows is that the Bloomington-Normal urban area has a higher need for affordable housing as compared to the rest of the county.

Map 11 gives a closer look into the specific census tracts that have higher need for affordable housing based on the analysis. The census tracts with the highest need for affordable housing are census tracts 13.02, 15, 16, 17, and 59 – all of which are in the city of Bloomington.

When comparing maps 10 and 11 to the rest, it is clear that the analysis is not simply a duplicate of patterns shown in other maps, such as those depicting race, household income, or other variables. However, it is also evident that the five census tracts with consistently high scores across multiple variables – particularly race, household income, cost burden, age, and education – collectively received the highest overall scores

Map 11. Affordable Housing Needs Index Map
Bloomington-Normal



While the maps show that there is a higher need for affordable housing, particularly in the Bloomington-Normal urban area, this does not suggest that the rest of the county does not, as evident in the findings of the Regional Housing Recovery Plan. What this White Paper offers is an empirical basis to support potential affordable housing developments to provide more targeted and equitable solutions for those most in need.

LIMITATIONS

This white paper is a first iteration to visualize where in the county is affordable housing in dire need. However, there are limitations of this research work that can be addressed in future studies to provide a more comprehensive picture of affordable housing needs. For example, this white paper did not look into other variables such as marital status, household size, unemployment, disability, among other factors.

Another limitation of this white paper is that it did not consider proximity to services, such as public transportation, schools, healthcare, etc. This paper strictly looked at demographic data available through the American Community Survey (ACS). Analyzing the proximity of census tracts to transit stops or lines could provide a better picture of housing affordability.

CONCLUSION

There is no question that McLean County is experiencing a housing crisis. Information about this can be read throughout documents posted by the local government or published by local news. This White paper identifies where in the county and for whom the need is greatest, through an Affordable Housing Needs Index backed by demographic data.

The analysis revealed that census tracts within the Bloomington-Normal area, particularly several tracts in Bloomington, have the highest need for affordable housing. These tracts consistently scored high across multiple factors, specifically race, household income, cost burden, age, and education. While this research highlights certain census tracts, it does not suggest that the rest of the county does not have any need for affordable housing. Rather, it shows that some areas experience disproportionately greater challenges. In times when funding is limited, knowing where to start and who needs help the most is critical.

Future iterations of this research paper can explore other factors, such as access to transit and schools, as well as other demographic variables such as marital status and unemployment. This would provide a more comprehensive view of the housing needs across the county.

1. McLean County Regional Planning Commission. (2024). [Regional Housing Recovery Plan](#)
2. McLean County Regional Planning Commission. (2024). [Bloomington-Normal Rental Rate Analysis 2022-2024](#)
3. McConnell, Eileen. (2013). Who has Housing Affordability Problems? Disparities in Housing Cost Burden by Race, Nativity, and Legal Status in Los Angeles
4. Withers, Suzanne. (1997). Demographic Polarization of Housing Affordability in Six Major United States Metropolitan Areas.
5. US Census Bureau. [2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates](#)
6. McLean County Regional Planning Commission. (2025). Income-Qualified Housing in McLean County: [2024 Area Median Income](#)
7. HUD. (2024). [Nearly Half of Renter Households Are Cost-Burdened, Proportions Differ by Race](#)
8. Census Reporter. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US17113-mclean-county-il/>