

Foreclosure numbers add up to a difficult year

No matter which method is used to count last year's statistics, they all indicate the number of foreclosures climbed in Minneapolis and in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.

By [STEVE BRANDT](#), Star Tribune

No matter how you count, foreclosures were up slightly in Minneapolis last year.

But it turns out there's more than one way to count. And that means that foreclosures in Minneapolis could be up anywhere from 2 to 8 percent.

Data issues aside, Minneapolis was hit first and hit hardest by foreclosures in Minnesota. With slightly more than 3,000 foreclosures last year, it accounted for about the same number as all of Ramsey County, which saw foreclosures rise by 28.6 percent last year.

But that's nothing next to suburban Hennepin County, where foreclosures were up 53 percent during 2008.

Ramsey and Hennepin counties accounted for almost two of every three metro-area foreclosures in 2007 and nearly two of every five statewide, according to counts by HousingLink, a nonprofit that collects affordable housing information. Its 2008 statewide figures won't be out until later this month.

But there's plenty of room for judgment when it comes to counting foreclosures.

For example, statisticians can count sheriff's sales -- one for each mortgage on a property -- or they can count properties. Each method gives a different number because multiple mortgages can be foreclosed involving the same owner and the same house.

Another issue is whether to count just mortgage foreclosures or foreclosures triggered by assessments, liens or other unpaid claims.

Minneapolis refined its use of foreclosure data during 2008. It adapted county data to count only one mortgage foreclosure per property and waited longer to close the books to accommodate a lag in the filing of foreclosure documents. It counted 3,077 foreclosures using those methods. That's up 6.2 percent from the official tally for 2007, which used

different counting methods. If you applied the same method to counting 2007 foreclosures, the increase would total 2 percent.

But counting differently, Hennepin County shows city foreclosures up 8 percent.

Another flaw in data counting is that focusing just on sheriff's sales doesn't indicate whether the owner was able to redeem the mortgage and stave off foreclosure by paying off the mortgage holder.

Regardless of the numbers, there's one bright spot, says Cherie Shoquist, the city's foreclosure project coordinator.

The number of foreclosures has depressed prices to the point where renters with good credit can find good deals on buying homes, she said.

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