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Scary Low Housing Numbers? Not Exactly

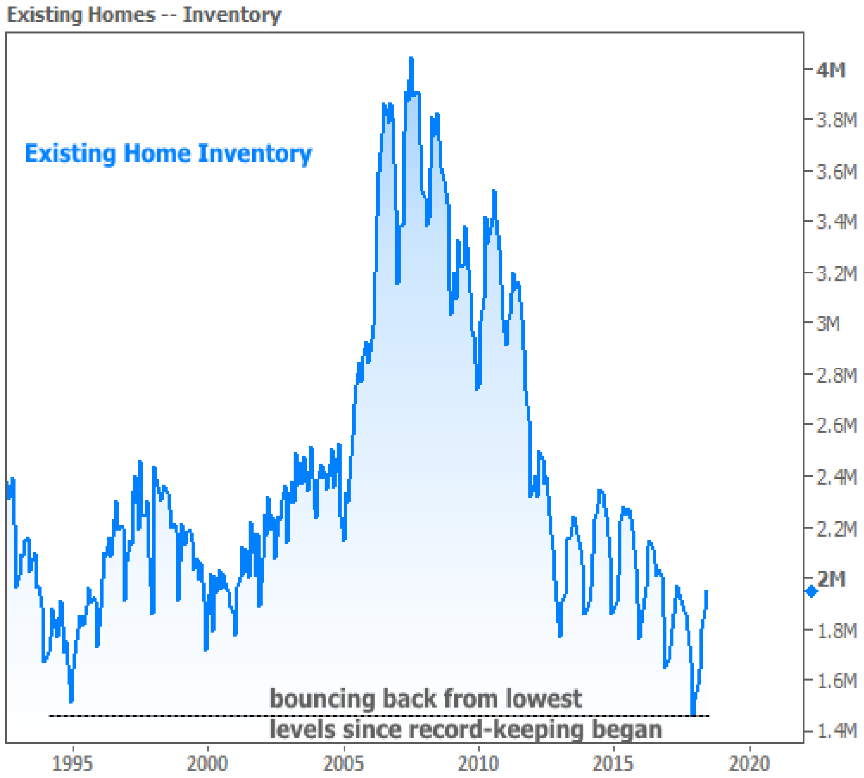
There's no question that some housing markets around the country are showing signs of cooling. Price reductions are starting to show up again after an extended absence, the average home is staying on the market a bit longer, and inventory is finally coming up from the lowest levels in decades.

To top it all off, this week's new construction numbers unexpectedly **remained near 10-month lows**. Combine that with rising rates, an expected seasonal slowdown in sales, as well as uncertainty about how long the current economic expansion will last, and it's more than fair to wonder if the housing market is in trouble.

But before you panic, consider the following facts:

INVENTORY

Yes, it's rising--especially for existing homes--but that's arguably a **GOOD** thing. Existing home inventory had been on an unsustainable path lower. The bounce reflects much-needed cooling of what had/has been a lopsided sellers' market.



National Average Mortgage Rates

	Rate	Change	Points
Mortgage News Daily			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.43%	+0.02	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	5.95%	0.00	0.00
30 Yr. FHA	5.82%	+0.02	0.00
30 Yr. Jumbo	6.62%	0.00	0.00
5/1 ARM	6.28%	-0.01	0.00
Freddie Mac			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.35%	-0.51	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	5.51%	-0.65	0.00

Rates as of: 8/30

Market Data

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 5.0	99.35	-0.16
MBS GNMA 5.0	99.91	-0.04
10 YR Treasury	3.9039	+0.0424
30 YR Treasury	4.1932	+0.0468

Pricing as of: 8/30 5:59PM EST

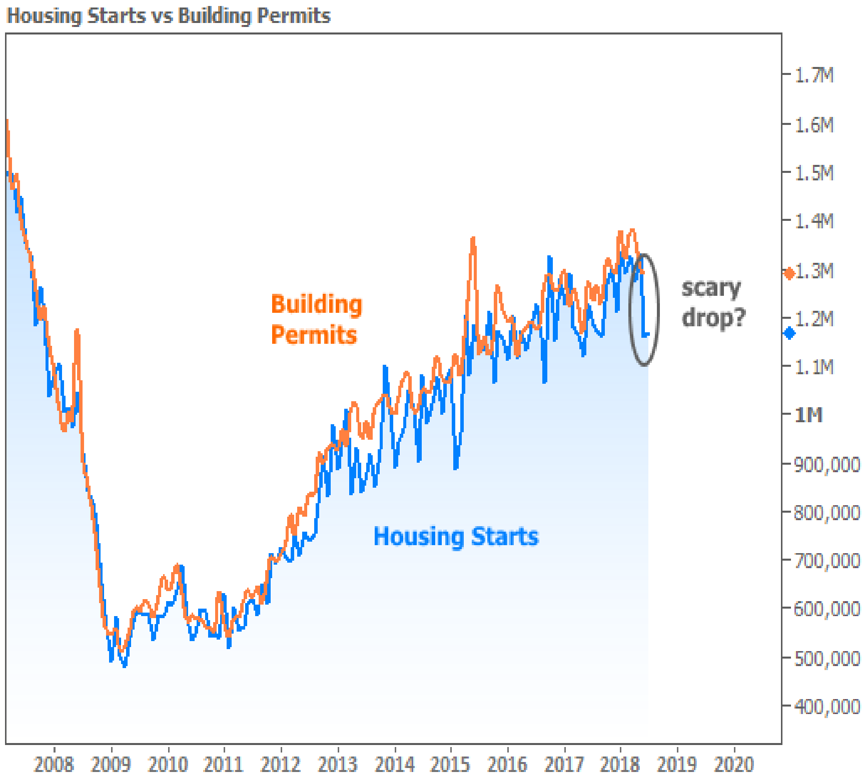
Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Aug 28	226.9	+0.49%
Building Permits	Mar	1.46M	-3.95%
Housing Starts	Mar	1.32M	-13.15%
New Home Sales	Mar	693K	+4.68%
Pending Home Sales	Feb	75.6	+1.75%
Existing Home Sales	Feb	3.97M	-0.75%
Builder Confidence	Mar	51	+6.25%

THIS WEEK'S BIG DROP IN HOUSING STARTS

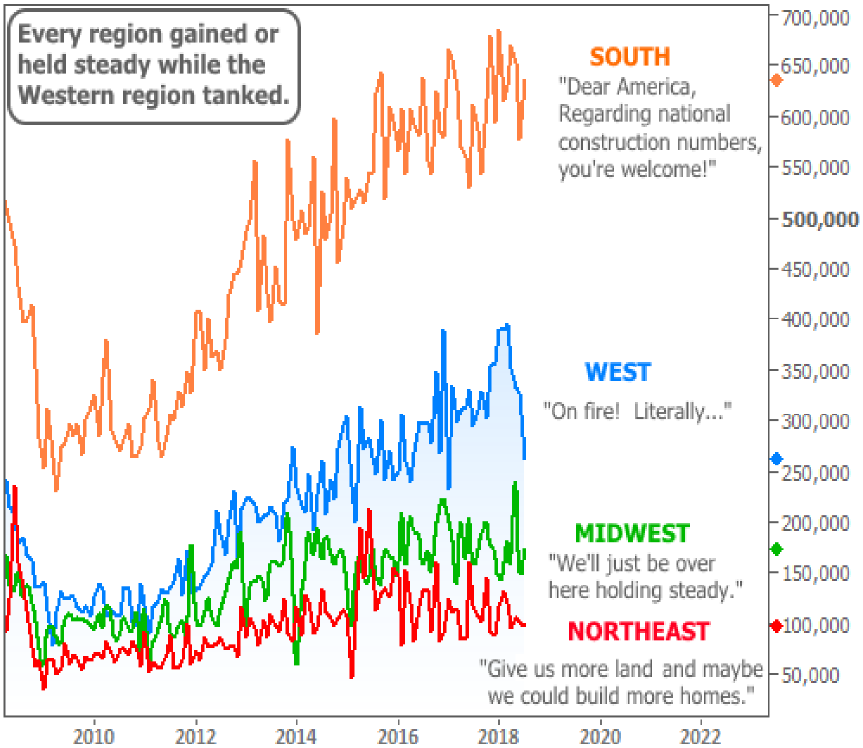
Technically, there wasn't a big drop this week's (July's data). It was the last report (June's data) that had the big drop. This week's report simply kept housing starts at unexpectedly low levels (analysts were calling for a decent bounce).

What is a "housing start" anyway? Think of it as the groundbreaking phase of home construction. Building permits come first and tend to be a bit less volatile. After all, a permit is mostly paperwork whereas groundbreaking depends on weather, labor, materials, etc. That occasionally results in construction numbers like those seen in the past 2 reports.



So **how do we know** if a big drop in housing starts can be chalked up to temporary variables? Many times, the easiest approach is to look at the numbers region by region. Last time, wild weather and flash floods in the Midwest dragged the numbers down. This time, the Midwest bounced back while the Western region took a turn feeling the effects from extreme weather (drought, high temps, wildfires).

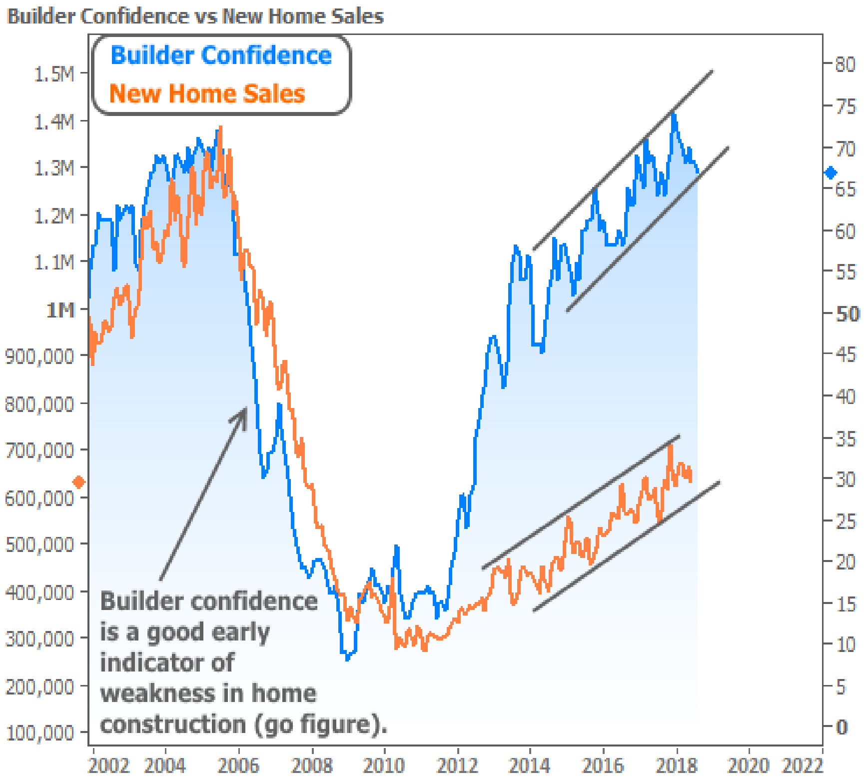
Regional Housing Starts



BUILDER CONFIDENCE

When we're pondering the fate the housing market, it's good to check in with builders. Confidence levels among builders are a **good early indicator** for new home sales. Incidentally, this week also brought the monthly builder confidence data, and while it's not skyrocketing back above recent long-term highs, it's definitely not painting the same picture as housing starts.

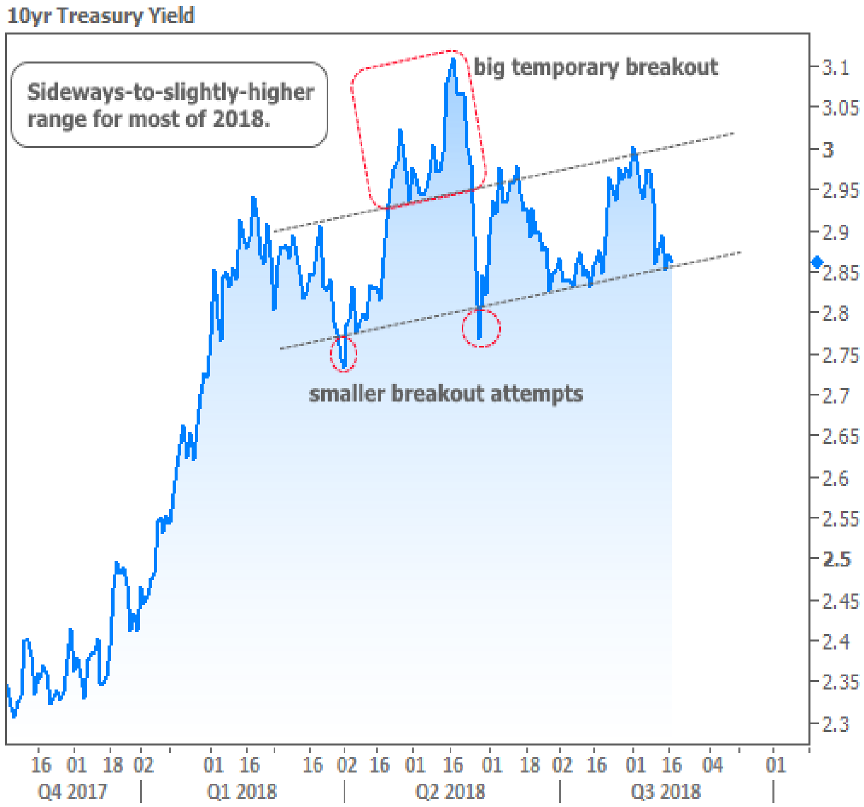
The following chart shows the persistent uptrend in builder confidence (via the NAHB's Housing Market Index) overlaid with New Home Sales (Census Bureau).



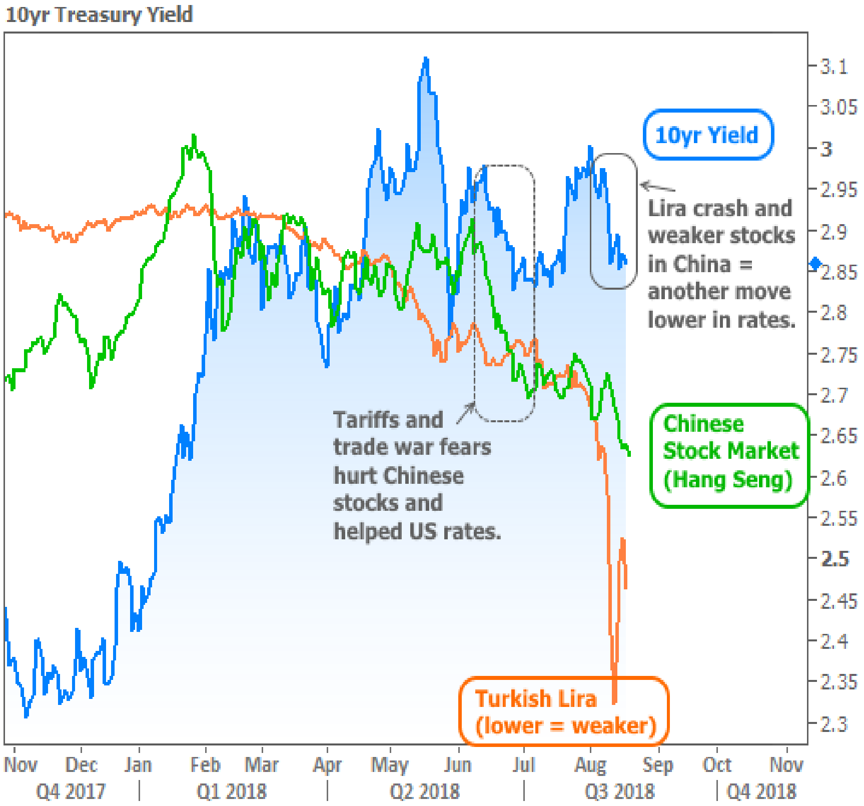
Bottom line: it's **fair** to discuss a **'leveling-off'** in home sales. Certainly, the housing market isn't looking as invincible as it did a year or two ago. But that sort of invincibility isn't ideal. The pace of home price appreciation wasn't sustainable, and it still isn't. We're also seeing some of the effects of interest rates that have held near long-term highs fairly consistently.

INTEREST RATES

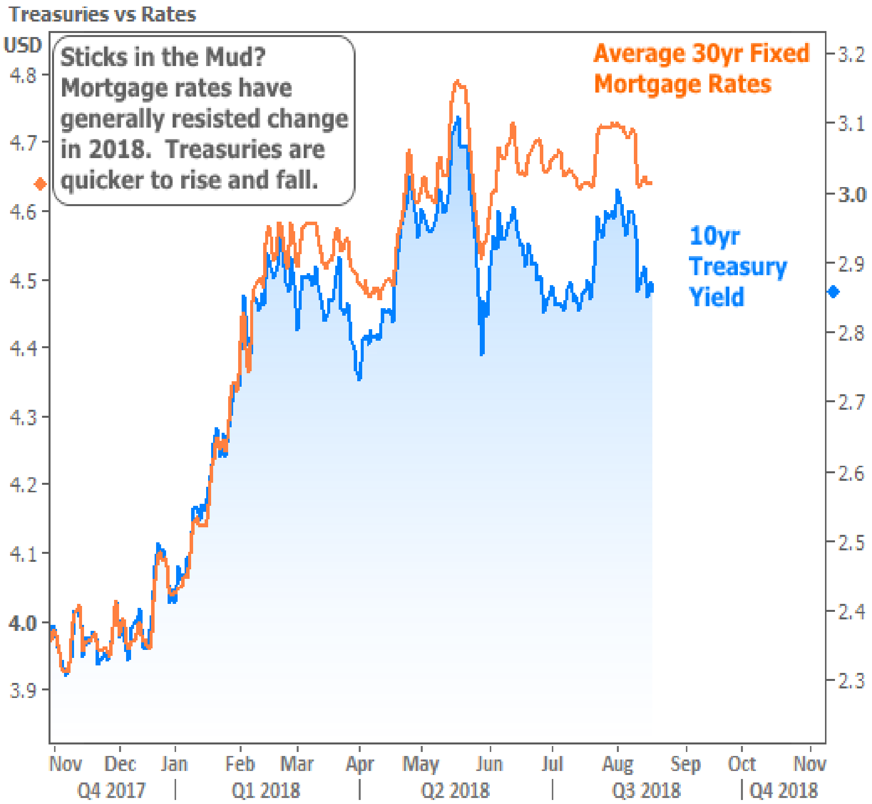
Rates have been doing fairly well over the past two weeks thanks to global economic jitters. But those jitters only add up to minor course corrections in the bigger picture. If we take a step back, we can see rates are moving sideways to slightly higher, despite a few attempts to break away from a fairly regular trend.



To put the global economic issues in perspective, consider that Turkish Lira and Chinese equities were two of this week's key stories. What happens if we overlay those indicators on the same chart of interest rates? If you look hard, there are a few examples of correlation, but Treasuries are definitely doing their own thing.



Contrary to popular belief, mortgage rates aren't based on US Treasuries, though there is plenty of correlation. That means mortgage rates can also do their own thing at times. This is usually hard to spot, because they tend to move in lock-step with Treasuries, but if we look at them side by side, we can see mortgage rates have been more reluctant to return to February's levels compared to 10yr Treasury yields.



This can eventually change, but until it does, sideways-to-higher rates aren't doing any favors for the housing market. Then again, that **could depend** on your definition of "favors." To whatever extent the housing market was too hot and needed to cool off a bit, mortgage rates near 7-year highs are happy to help.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Tuesday, Aug 14				
8:30AM	Jul Import prices mm (%)	0.0	0.1	-0.4
8:30AM	Jul Export prices mm (%)	-0.5	0.2	0.3
Wednesday, Aug 15				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	225.5		233.1
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	927.5		927.6
8:30AM	Jul Retail Sales (%)	0.5	0.1	0.5
8:30AM	Aug NY Fed Manufacturing	25.60	20.00	22.60
8:30AM	Q2 Productivity Preliminary (%)	2.9	2.3	0.4

Event Importance:

No Stars = Insignificant
☆ Low
★ Moderate
★★ Important
★★ Very Important

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
8:30AM	Q2 Labor Costs Preliminary (%)	-0.9	0.3	2.9
9:15AM	Jul Industrial Production (%)	0.1	0.3	0.6
9:15AM	Jul Capacity Utilization (%)	78.1	78.2	78.0
10:00AM	Aug NAHB housing market indx	67	67	68
10:00AM	Jun Business Inventories (%)	0.1	0.1	0.4
Thursday, Aug 16				
8:30AM	Jul House starts mm: change (%)	0.9		-12.3
8:30AM	Jul Building permits: number (ml)	1.311	1.310	1.292
8:30AM	Jul Housing starts number mm (ml)	1.168	1.260	1.173
8:30AM	Jul Build permits: change mm (%)	1.5		-0.7
8:30AM	Aug Philly Fed Business Index	11.9	22.0	25.7
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	212	215	214
Friday, Aug 17				
10:00AM	Aug Consumer Sentiment	95.3	98.0	97.9
Wednesday, Aug 22				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	232.1		225.5
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	982.7		927.5
10:00AM	Jul Existing home sales (ml)	5.34	5.40	5.38
10:00AM	Jul Exist. home sales % chg (%)	-0.7	0.6	-0.6
Thursday, Aug 23				
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	210	214	212
9:00AM	Jun Monthly Home Price yy (%)	6.5		6.4
Friday, Aug 24				
8:30AM	Jul Durable goods (%)	-1.7	-0.5	0.8
8:30AM	Jul Nondefense ex-air (%)	1.4	0.4	0.2

Service oriented, responsive, competitive rates and an in depth knowledge of todays mortgage market

After completing my degree in finance at the University of Connecticut, I started in the mortgage business right out of college in 2004. With 15+ years of experience and a primary objective of thoroughly explaining all available loan options to my clients with what is typically the largest investment in their lives, I strive to always make myself available. I constantly educate myself with respect to the mortgage industry and underwriting guidelines for FHA, VA, conventional and jumbo financing. I deliver on the expectations discussed up front and provide the service level my clients deserve from day one. I will remain in touch throughout the process and continue to follow up with you after closing. My goal is to wow you and turn you into clients for life. I want you to be so impressed that throughout and after the process you share my information with your friends, family, neighbors and co-workers who may value from my services.

Steve Chizmadia