US Housing Market Weekly

January 29, 2021

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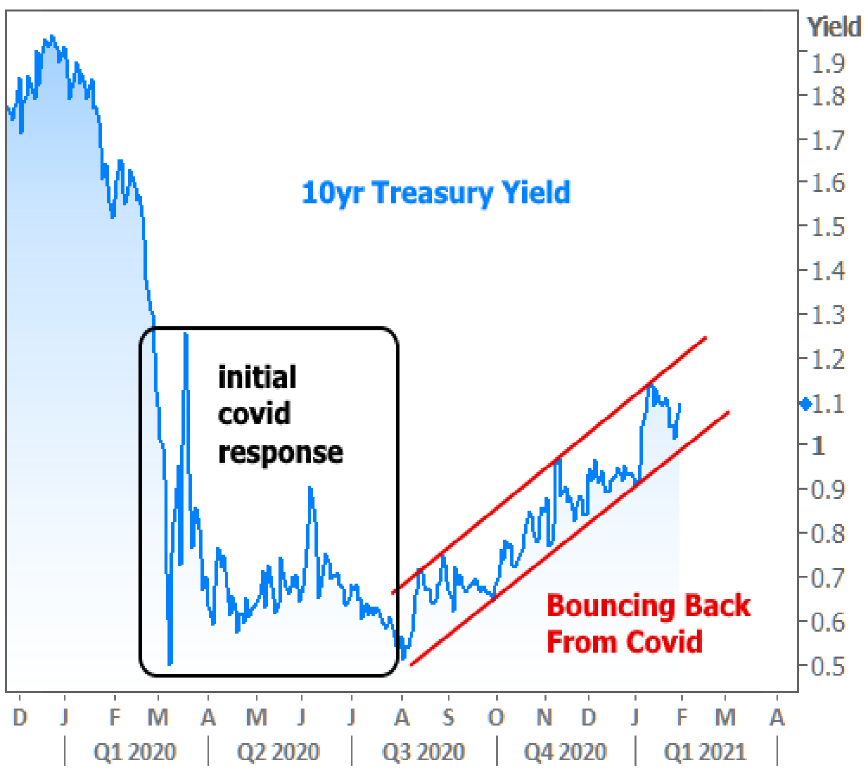
Rising Rate Risks Returning

After spiking in early January, interest rates returned to near-all-time-low levels by the middle of the week. By the end, however, the market began to flash a **warning** about more volatility ahead.

The warning is fairly simple. It has to do with a pattern that's been **repeating** in the bond market (the key ingredient in determining rates). The pattern is technically referred to as a "trend channel," which is just a fancy way of saying that rates are steadily rising or falling in a relatively regular way. In the current case, they've been rising since August.



Rates tend to fall when the economic outlook is downbeat or uncertain. As such, it makes sense to see volatility and all-time lows during the first phase of the pandemic followed by gradual healing in the 2nd half of the year. Gradual healing = **gradually higher rates**.

If you mainly follow mortgage rates instead of the broader bond market, you may be thinking "but rates haven't been gradually higher!" and you'd be right. That's because mortgage rates cut a **very different** path for most of 2020. Here's the same chart with mortgage rates added on the left axis:

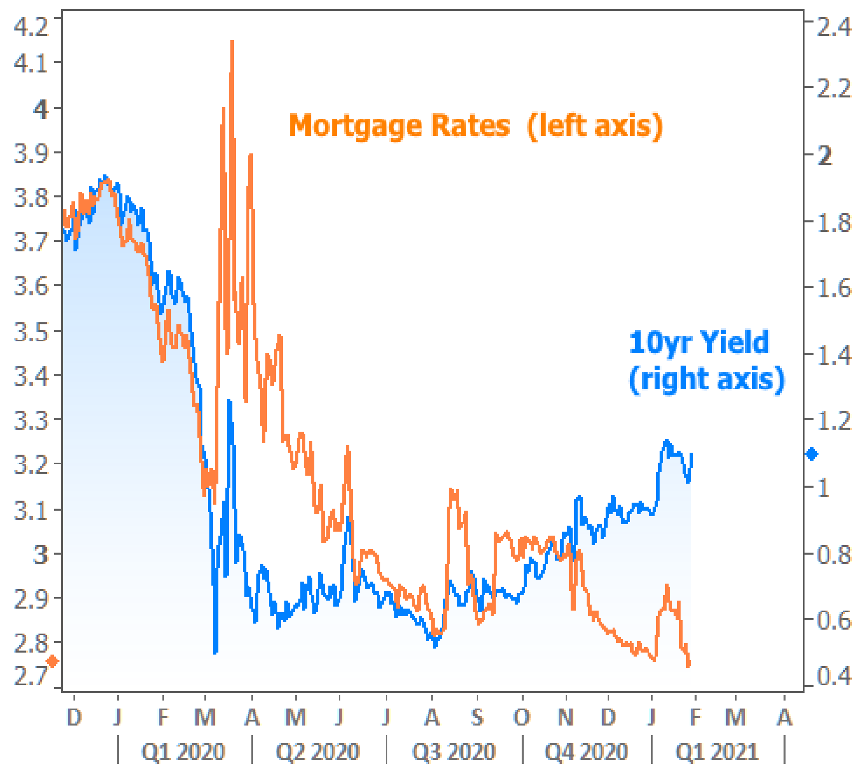
Market Data

	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

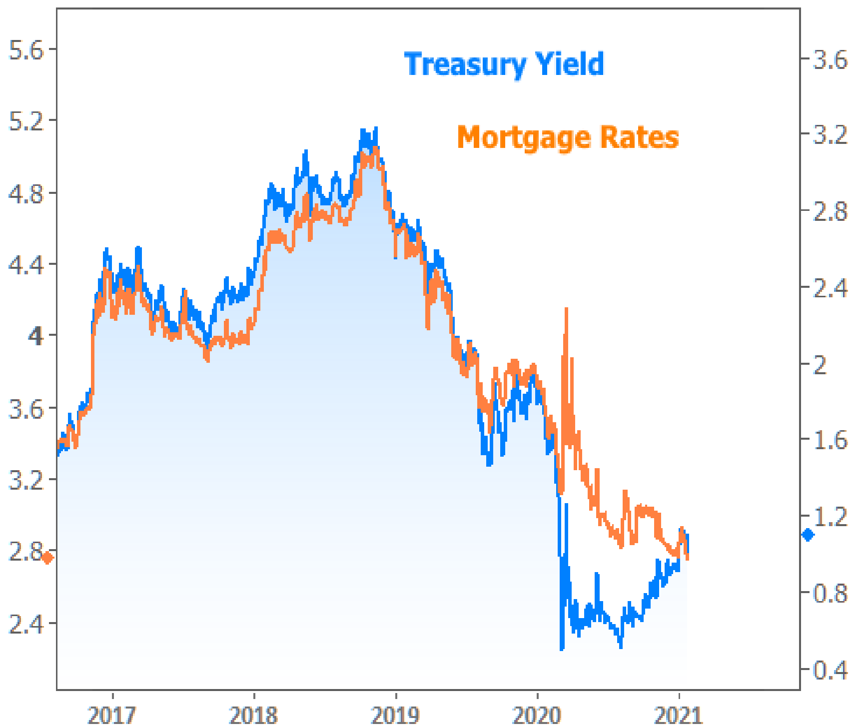
Pricing as of: 8/30 5:59PM EST

Recent Housing Data

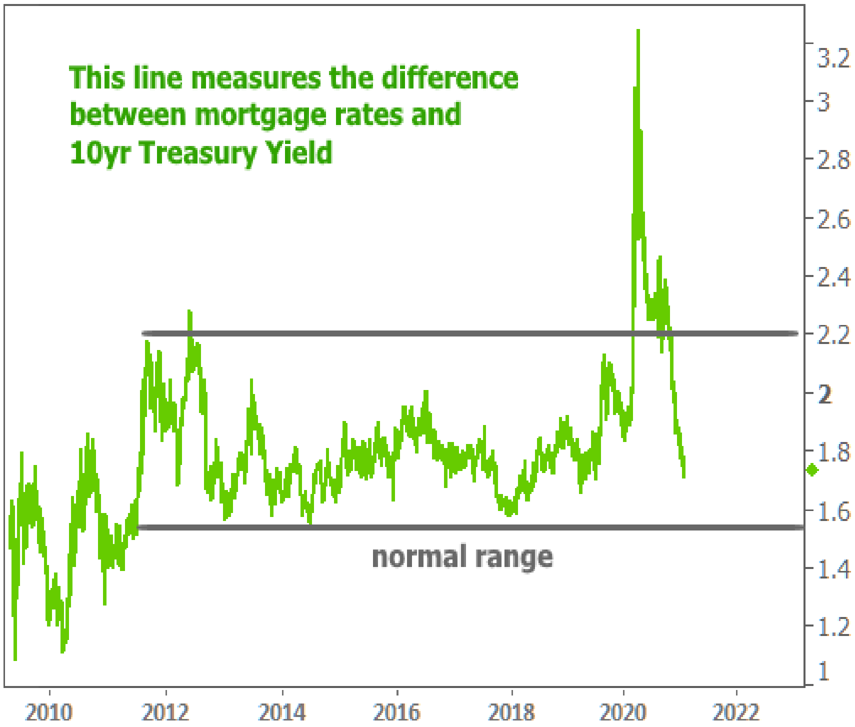
		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Aug 28	226.9	+0.49%
Building Permits	Mar	1.46M	-3.95%
Housing Starts	Mar	1.32M	-13.15%
New Home Sales	Mar	693K	+4.68%
Pending Home Sales	Feb	75.6	+1.75%
Existing Home Sales	Feb	3.97M	-0.75%
Builder Confidence	Mar	51	+6.25%



Keep in mind that this chart will look different depending on the time frame selected. For instance, if we zoom out a bit more and adjust the scaling, we get the impression that mortgage rates **were not** able to fall as much as Treasury yields at the start of the pandemic, but the two are now more-or-less **reconnected**.

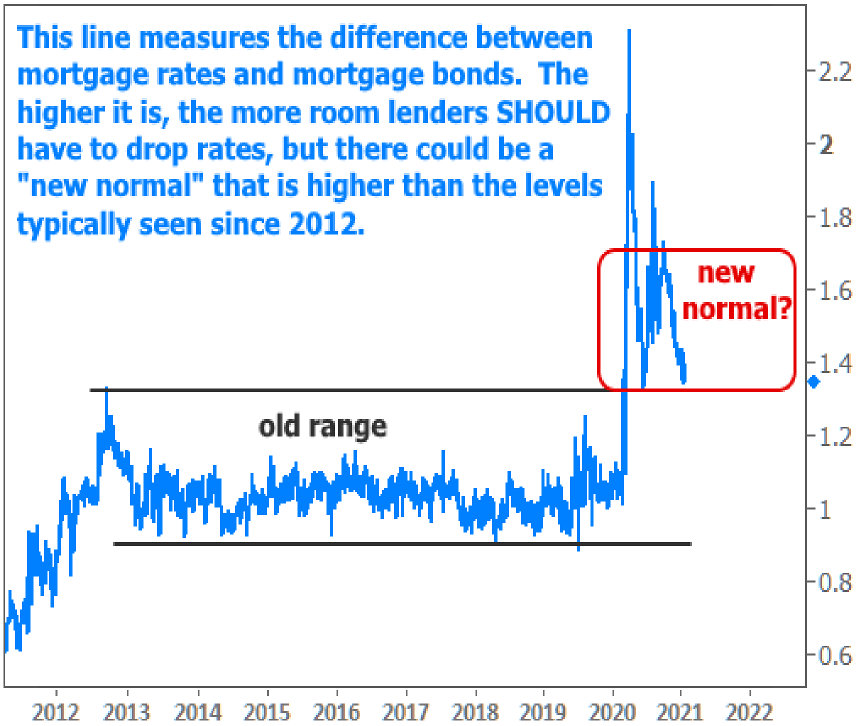


Indeed, that's the right way to view it. Why? Because there's an **established range** between Treasury yields and mortgage rates, and we're right back in the middle of it.



The implication is that mortgage rates will now be **less capable** of defying the will of the broader bond market. In other words, if Treasury yields keep rising, mortgage rates are more likely to follow than they were during the 2nd half of 2020.

One could rightfully argue that Treasury yields are far from the only consideration for mortgage rates (obviously, based on 2 of the charts above). But even when we look at the mortgage-backed-bonds that are directly responsible for mortgage rates, we're seeing a similar return to normalcy. Granted, it's not the "old normal" that existed before covid, but for the time being, there is a "new normal" that requires lenders to set rates a bit higher relative to the bond market than they have historically.



If you're not exactly sure what you're looking at, **here's some more background:** mortgage-backed bonds set a baseline for the rates lenders can offer. But lenders have an additional margin that covers things like their profitability, servicing costs, regulatory fees, and any other "cushion" to insure against uncertain market conditions.

Covid caused many of these additional costs to spike, thus making mortgage rates MUCH higher than past precedent suggested they should be. The chart above shows that precedent as well as the "covid effect."

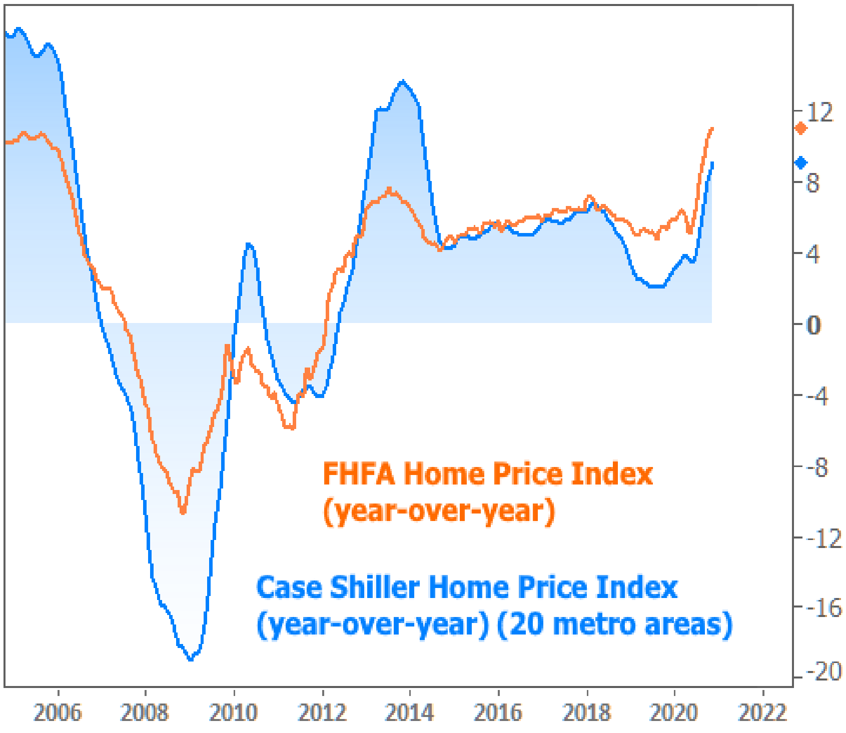
The **blue line represents lenders' cushion**, and although it's not yet back to the normal range, that normal range is probably higher than it used to be. So the fact that we've seen bounces at the same place 2 times now suggests the cushion is getting thin.

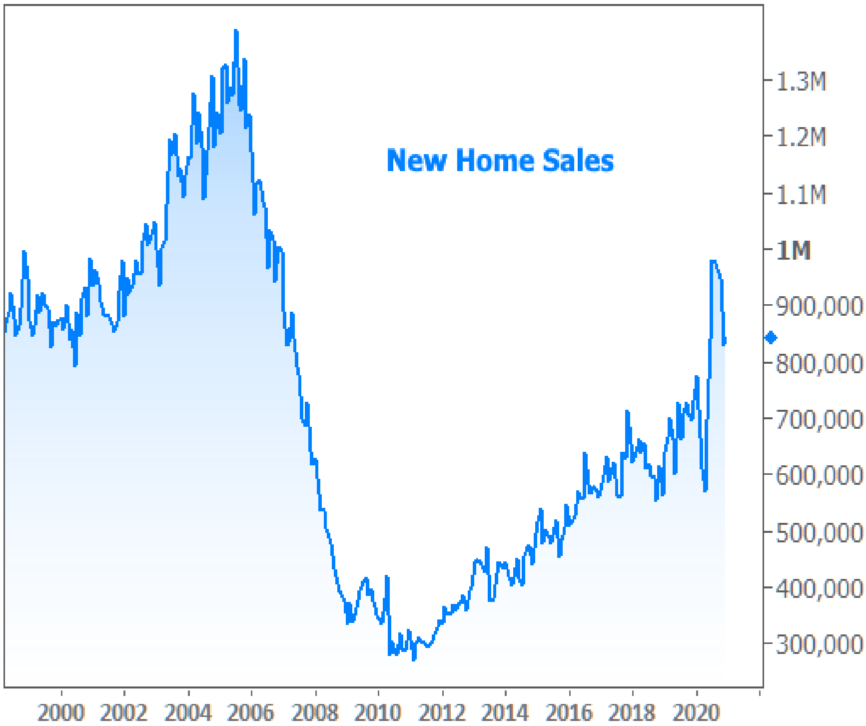
Bottom line: it's harder and harder for mortgage rates to **avoid** taking part in broader bond market volatility. So when we see Treasury yields bounce to remain in a rising trend as they did this week, we should be more concerned about mortgage rates following suit than we were conditioned to be in 2020.

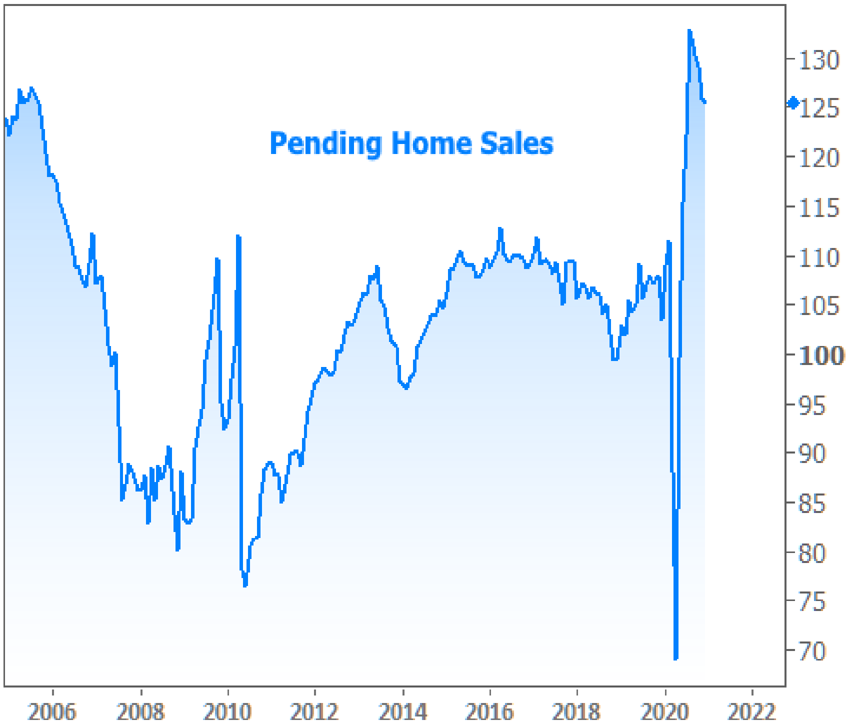
Housing Data Recap

There were several housing related reports released this week. here's a quick run-down followed by charts:

- Home price data was stellar on Tuesday with both Case Shiller and FHFA reporting another big increase for the month of November.
- New Home Sales were roughly unchanged for December after pulling back from long-term highs in September. Apart from the past 5 months, December would have been a 15-year high.
- Pending Home Sales were also roughly unchanged for December. They too remain close to the long-term highs seen in September.







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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Tuesday, Jan 26				

Event Importance:

No Stars = Insignificant

☆ Low

★ Moderate

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
9:00AM	Nov CaseShiller 20 yy (%)	+9.1	8.6	7.9
9:00AM	Nov Monthly Home Price yy (%)	+11.0		10.2
10:00AM	Jan Consumer confidence	89.3	89.0	88.6
Wednesday, Jan 27				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Refi Index	4261.5		4484.2
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	334.2		348.2
8:30AM	Dec Durable goods (%)	0.2	0.9	1.0
2:00PM	N/A FOMC rate decision (%)	0.000 - 0.250	0.125	0.125
Thursday, Jan 28				
8:30AM	Q4 GDP Advance (%)	4.0	4.0	33.4
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	847	830	900
10:00AM	Dec New Home Sales (%) (%)	1.6	1.9	-11.0
10:00AM	Dec New Home Sales (ml)	0.842	0.865	0.841
10:00AM	Dec Leading index chg mm (%)	+0.3	0.3	0.6
Friday, Jan 29				
8:30AM	Dec Core PCE Inflation (y/y) (%)	1.5	1.3	1.4
9:45AM	Jan Chicago PMI	63.8	58.5	59.5
10:00AM	Dec Pending Sales Index	125.5		125.7
10:00AM	Jan Consumer Sentiment (ip)	79.0	79.2	79.2
10:00AM	Dec Pending Home Sales (%)	-0.3	-0.1	-2.6
Monday, Feb 01				
10:00AM	Dec Construction spending (%)	1.0	0.9	0.9
10:00AM	Jan ISM Manufacturing PMI	58.7	60.0	60.7
Tuesday, Feb 02				
9:45AM	Jan ISM-New York index	818.2		817.6
Wednesday, Feb 03				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	334.6		334.2
7:00AM	w/e MBA Refi Index	4746.2		4261.5
8:15AM	Jan ADP National Employment (k)	174	49	-123
10:00AM	Jan ISM N-Mfg PMI	58.7	56.8	57.2
Thursday, Feb 04				
8:30AM	Q4 Labor Costs Preliminary (%)	6.8	4.0	-6.6
10:00AM	Dec Factory orders mm (%)	1.1	0.7	1.0
Friday, Feb 05				
8:30AM	Jan Non-farm payrolls (k)	49	50	-140
8:30AM	Jan Unemployment rate mm (%)	6.3	6.7	6.7
8:30AM	Dec International trade mm $ (bl)	-66.6	-65.7	-68.1

Important
Very Important

Who We Are

When choosing a mortgage loan officer, trust is a key component. You want a lender who will honor their commitments, create a satisfying customer experience and recommend and provide loan products that meet your financing goals. We are readily accessible and committed to serving you and your needs. We aim to not only meet, but to exceed your expectations. We are a lender you can trust.

Wil Harmsen