

Life & Times

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2024

FED CONFIRMED A RATE CUT MAY BE COMING IN SEPTEMBER

As expected, the Fed held interest rates steady at its July 31 meeting but laid the foundation for rate cuts to start in September.

The Fed confirmed a potential **September rate cut**. In a Q&A with reporters, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell stated that "...a reduction in the policy rate could be on the table as soon as the next meeting in September." which is in line with market expectations. He further clarified that starting cuts in September is dependent on the inflation data not turning back up unexpectedly, but he set a rather low bar for incoming data saying that it didn't necessarily need to improve. And in answering a question on whether the first rate cut would be the first of many, he said he could imagine anything from zero to several cuts. But he rather firmly

guidance, but the Fed is clearly more attuned to the risks of keeping rates high. The only changes to the formal policy statement were to soften the language on inflation risk and place greater attention on both sides of their dual mandate (low inflation and low unemployment). That suggests the Fed is now less worried about high inflation, and more worried about high rates tipping the labor market into a recession.

This is unlikely to impact mortgage rates this week, but their gradual decline should continue. Mortgage rates are unlikely to change much in the coming days, but the Fed's gradual pivot and the impending start of the rate-cutting cycle signals a slow and gradual decline in the near to medium term. Mortgage rates have already come down from their recent peak in mid-April, and homebuying demand has yet to improve. Some potential homebuyers may be waiting for rates to fall more, and some are spooked by political uncertainty.

Source: Chen Zhao, Redfin News

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dismissed the notion of starting with a 50 bps cut, which some who are more worried about labor market deterioration, have floated as a possibility.

One takeaway from the press conference: The Fed is aware of the risks of high interest rates. The Fed's official statement today and Chair Powell's opening statement contained no explicit forward

**FREE
MONTHLY DRAWING**

See Page 8
For Details

WHY FIXING UP YOUR HOUSE CAN HELP IT SELL FASTER

If you're thinking about selling your house, you should know there are buyers who are ready and able to pay today's high prices, but they want a home that's move-in ready. A recent press release from Redfin shows: "Buyers are still out there and they're willing to pay today's high prices, but only if the house is in really good shape. They don't want to spend extra money on paint or new appliances."

It makes sense when you think about it. They're having to pay a lot of money for a house in today's market. That means they may not be able to easily afford upgrades after they move in. So, if your home is outdated or needs some work, buyers might pass it by or offer a lower price than you were hoping for.

And there are a lot of homes that need upgrades right now. Millions are entering their prime remodel years, meaning they're between 20 and 39 years old. Maybe yours is one of them. According to *John Burns Research and Consulting (JBRC)*, the number of homes in their prime remodel years is high and growing.

If your house falls into this category, it's important to consider making certain updates to help it appeal to buyers & sell faster. But how do you know where to spend your time and money?

Why You Need a Real Estate Agent

By working with a local real estate agent to be strategic about the improvements you make, you can be sure you're making a

smart investment. Put simply, not all upgrades are worth the cost. As *Bankrate* says: "Before you spend money on costly upgrades, be sure the changes you make will have a high return on investment. It doesn't make sense to install new granite countertops, for example, if you only stand to break even on them, or even lose money." And, as that same *Bankrate* article goes on to say, that's where a local real estate agent comes in: "... a good real estate agent will know what local buyers expect and can help you decide what needs doing and what doesn't."

Your agent will know what buyers in your area are looking for and what they're willing to pay for it. By working together, you can avoid spending money on upgrades that won't pay off. Instead, they'll fill you in on which changes will make your house more appealing and valuable.

Bottom Line

Selling a house right now requires more than just putting up a For Sale sign. You need to make sure it's in good condition to attract buyers who are willing to pay today's high prices.

The way to do that is by making smart improvements that will give you the best return on your investment. Work with a local real estate agent so you know what buyers are looking for and what your house needs before selling.

Source: Keeping Current Matters

OUTAGE PREPARATION



Take steps to be prepared and stay safe.

Have a buddy system.

Check in on elderly or people with access and function needs.



Charge cell phones and laptops.

Prepare for power outages by charging cell phones and laptops. Have a backup power supply.



Alternate plans for medicines or medical devices.

Have alternative plans in place for refrigerating medicines or power-dependent medical devices.



Freeze containers filled with water to make blocks of ice.

Frozen containers of ice can be placed in your refrigerator or freezer during an outage to prevent food from spoiling.



Use generators safely.

Standby electric generators should be properly installed by a licensed electrician and placed in a well-ventilated area.



Use flashlights, not candles.

During a power outage, use battery-operated flashlights, not candles, due to risk of fire.



COAT RACK: ALTERNATIVE USE

Great Idea to keep your shoes organized by the door.

Take an ordinary coat rack
and mount it low to hang shoes.

Add a second rack right above for even more shoes.



MILITARY: USAA TO PAY \$64.2 MILLION TO SERVICE MEMBERS

USAA has agreed to pay \$64.2 million to settle a class-action lawsuit alleging that its banks improperly charged fees and high interest rates that violated federal protections for service members who held loans.

Under the agreement released Friday, defendants USAA Federal Savings Bank and USAA Savings Bank -- the company's credit card subsidiary that is now part of USAA Federal Savings Bank -- did not admit any wrongdoing but agreed to pay roughly 210,000 members to settle a case filed in November 2021.

In the suit, four plaintiffs alleged the banks did not lower interest rates or fees in compliance with the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA), causing improper inflation of customers' principal balances and resulting in calculations of compound interest based on the higher balances.

The banks then "concealed their overcharges from thousands of military families," according to the claimants in *Bulls et al. v. USAA Federal Savings Bank et. al.* "Despite their representations to plaintiffs and other class members, defendants failed to comply with the SCRA and the terms of its USAA Military Benefits Program," the lawsuit read.

The Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, passed in 2003 in its current form, is designed to protect troops from financial burdens while they are serving in the U.S. military by suspending, postponing or reducing obligations like loans, rent or insurance costs under certain circumstances.

According to the lawsuit, the U.S. Treasury's Office of the Comptroller of the Currency found 546 violations of the SCRA and 54 violations of the Military Lending Act during a March 2019 performance evaluation of USAA Federal Savings Bank, including failure to protect military reservists from high fees and wrongful repossession of vehicles.

The office issued a cease-and-desist order and required the bank to begin remediation to customers. In 2020, it fined the bank \$85 million for failing to implement or maintain an effective program to monitor for compliance or measure information technology risk regarding the laws.

In a statement provided to Military.com, Roger Wildermuth, USAA's director for public relations, said the company "strongly disagrees" with the charges but

decided to settle "in the best interest of our membership" and to avoid lengthy, "expensive litigation so we can focus on providing exceptional service."

According to Wildermuth, after realizing the issue, USAA had "already compensated members for errors that may have occurred related to the allegations" before the lawsuit was filed.

"Roughly half of the announced settlement amount is simply reissuing checks we had previously mailed that our members never cashed," Wildermuth said.

The lawsuit alleged, however, that those checks were sent with correspondence that "misleadingly stated that the recipient 'may have' been entitled to 'benefits and/or protections'" and were printed in a way that would prompt recipients to toss them.

"The correspondence was often sent in a nondescript envelope that appeared to many service members as a solicitation or junk mail," according to the complaint.

The settlement, which still requires a judge's approval, could result in each plaintiff receiving slightly more than \$200, with the four named plaintiffs -- all former members of the Army Reserve or Army National Guard -- getting an estimated \$20,000 each.

The attorneys for the plaintiffs, with Seattle-based firms Smith & Lowney PLLC and Hagens Berman Sobol Shapiro LLP, have requested 27.5% of the settlement, or more than \$17 million, for legal fees and expenses.

Members of the class include troops who had a credit card account or loan with a USAA bank while actively serving any time after May 4, 2009, and who would have been subject to interest rate reduction protections under the SCRA and the Military Lending Act.

The settlement does not say whether all affected will be notified, but the only troops included are those who received and deposited a check from a USAA bank as a result of the correction or were identified as being eligible for one.


If approved, details on the settlement, including paperwork to opt out, will be posted on www.USAABankClassAction.com.

Source: Patricia Kime, Military.com



TIPS TO STAY SAFE AND COOL

 **Plan Ahead.** Check the weather forecast to prepare for hot days.

 **Stay Safe.** Stay out of direct sunlight and avoid alcoholic or caffeinated beverages.

 **Have a Buddy System.** Check in on elderly or people with access and function needs.

 **Stay Hydrated.** Drink plenty of water, even when you are not thirsty.

 **Stay Cool.** Take a cool shower or bath and wear lightweight, loose, light-colored clothing.

 **Keep an Emergency Contact List.** Keep a list of emergency phone numbers.



www.pge.com/tips

STAY CHARGED UP THROUGHOUT YOUR WORKDAY

Work can be tedious at times, and keeping your energy up can be a challenge. When you find yourself dragging, remember these suggestions for getting back to full speed:

- Move around. Take a quick walk outside, or just around your workplace. Climb some stairs or do some stretches to get the blood flowing.
- Drink some water. Dehydration can cause fatigue. Keep a water bottle handy and take a drink every time you feel either tired or thirsty.
- Take a nap. Find a quiet spot where you can lay your head down without interruption and have a short snooze. A 10-minute nap can leave you feeling refreshed and ready for the rest of the day.
- Blink. Eyestrain can make you tired if you spend too much time staring at a computer screen. Get into the habit of

taking regular breaks. Try looking at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes—it's called the "20-20-20" technique.

- Have a peppermint. The smell of peppermint can be invigorating. Have peppermint tea, chew gum, or suck on a hard candy to stimulate your senses.
- Take a breath. You need oxygen for energy. Pause once in a while to roll your shoulders back for three or four long, deep breaths.
- Schedule your coffee. A cup of coffee can get you going in the morning, but timing is crucial. Experts

say the best time for your java is around 10 a.m. Another cup after lunch, when your energy typically starts to lag, can get you through the remainder of your day.



Source: Cheryl Bower,
SF Realtor

Data Breach—National Public Data

National Public Data, a company that provides background-checks, is facing a class action lawsuit alleging the personal information of nearly 3 billion unsuspecting people was exposed. If confirmed, the suspected data breach from April could be among the biggest. As most of the personal information gathered by NPD is scraped from non-public sources, victims didn't knowingly provide their info to NPD, which may include Social Security numbers, names, addresses, and more. If exploited, cybercriminals can use this information to commit identity theft.

Source: LifeLock



Today's Laugh

I don't know much about birds but I can easily identify the husband in this picture



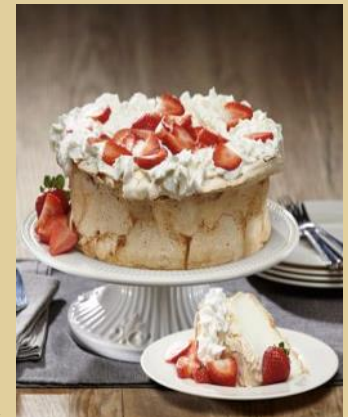
Schaum Torte

INGREDIENTS:

- 8 egg whites
- 2 c. sugar
- 1/8 tsp. cream of tartar
- 1/8 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- Strawberries
- Whipped Cream

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Grease a 9" spring form pan. Put all ingredients in mixer bowl. Beat on high speed for 20 minutes.
3. Spoon into pan; bake 15 min. at 350° F, then reduce heat to 250° F and bake 45 min. more. Leave in oven to cool.
4. Top with sliced strawberries and whipped cream.



Source: CountryDoor

Egg-Plant Pots



NEEDED

- 1 Egg Carton
- Scissors
- Black Marker
- Potting Soil
- 4 Seed Packets
- Spoon, Plate and Water

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut off the top of the egg carton, leaving just the bottom.
2. Separate 4 egg cups from the carton to create a pot collection. Use scissors to trim the edges so they are even & smooth.
3. Write the name of each plant on one side of each of the egg cups and fill each with a few scoops of potting soil. Place a few seeds of one plant in the appropriately labeled pot.
4. Place all the pots on a large plate and position the plate near a sunny window. Water the plants according to the instructions on each package.
5. When the plants get too big for the pots, transfer them to a bigger pot or to a garden outside. There's no need to remove the plants from the egg cups when planting in the garden; they will decompose into the soil!



Source: Lady Sandra

HOW TO REMODEL AND KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE TOGETHER

“Building or remodeling a home can be about the most stressful activity a married couple can engage in,” says Dr. Don Gilbert, a marriage counselor in West Des Moines, IA.

“It has all the components that couples stress over – money, multiple decisions, and different preferences. In fact, there are so many opportunities for relationship stress during remodeling that it brings out in each person the weaknesses they may have in communication and conflict management.”

So if you and your spouse are ready to say “I do” and commit to a remodeling project, here’s what you need to know to keep your cool — and your marriage — intact.

Communicate, talk, discuss

Lack of communication is one of the primary reasons couples divorce, so talk about your dreams and expectations for the project from the get-go. You’ll want to hash out as many decisions as possible before you swing a hammer.

Get your conversation rolling (and keep it going) by using visual aids or professional advice.

- Google SketchUp is a free online design tool allows you to create a 3D version of your new space, like a pro, so you can discuss changes and see a finished model before you start.
- Various home improvement apps help you visualize paint colors, room reconfigurations, and compare prices of materials and appliances. Make as many decisions as possible.
- An architect or qualified designer/builder can help you visualize your goals, anticipate problems, and capture your ideas on paper.

You’ll pay a qualified designer \$50 to \$150 per hour, or 5% to 20% of the total cost of your project.

Head off budget busters by stashing cash

Any home improvement veteran will tell you that there’s almost always at least one unforeseen issue that boosts costs, such as hidden insect damage or water damage that needs repair.

Prepare for creeping costs and avoid money woes that lead to



matrimonial mayhem by adding 15% to your remodeling budget.

And if you’re lucky enough to be under budget at the end of your project, take some of your cash reserve and splurge on an intimate, congratulatory dinner for two.

Defuse stress and take a break

During major remodeling, dust gets everywhere, noise is often nonstop during the day, and strangers are in and out of your home. You may not have access to one of your bathrooms or even your kitchen for weeks at a time.

Some ways you can find relief during the process:

- **Pamper at home.** Ensure you have a “safe room” at home that’s remodeling-free, where you can escape the general destruction and de-stress. Or, enjoy the journey and invite friends over anyway. Take pictures of your “card table dinner party,” complete with paper plates and plastic wine glasses, and you can all reminisce about it one day.
- **Get away.** Treat yourself to dinner out whenever you can afford it. Another option is to spend the night at a friend’s house, or stay in a nice hotel for the weekend.
- **Call in reinforcements.** Hire a cleaning service to come in once a week and deal with the dust and debris.

Know your DIY limits

Overestimating your DIY skills and the time you have to devote to a project is a major stress-inducer. If you’re banking on saving cash by taking on some or all of the work yourself, make sure you have the proper tools, know-how, and discipline.

If you’re unsure, it may be time to hire a pro.

During their own kitchen remodeling, Megan and Darren Boettcher put the kids to bed (smart move) before attempting to install a new dishwasher.

“We were working by flashlight because we turned the power off,” Megan recalls, “or so we thought. My hubby shocked himself and then a small fire started on the kitchen floor. I thought, ‘Ugh! Really? A fire? We’re installing a dishwasher!’

“It was a tense night, but we made it. Next time we’re calling a professional installer.”

Source: Jan Soultz Walker

CALIFORNIA HOME SALES: JUNE 2024

State/Region/County	June 2024	May 2024	MTM% Chg	State/Region/County	June 2024	May 2024	MTM% Chg
Calif. State Average	\$900,720	\$908,040	-0.8%	Solano	\$601,250	\$605,000	-0.6%
Calif. Condo Average	\$697,000	\$690,000	+1.0%	Contra-Costa	\$903,000	\$942,500	-4.2%
Sacramento	\$560,000	\$555,000	+0.9%	San Francisco	\$1,650,000	\$1,690,000	-2.4%
Placer	\$685,000	\$675,000	+1.5%	Fresno	\$428,890	\$425,000	+0.9%
El Dorado	\$709,000	\$699,000	+1.4%	Santa Clara	\$1,955,000	\$2,100,000	-6.9%
Yolo	\$649,500	\$653,980	-0.7%	Orange County	\$1,450,000	\$1,422,500	+1.9%
Stanislaus	\$495,000	\$489,500	+1.1%	Los Angeles	\$889,180	\$811,610	+9.6%
San Joaquin	\$550,000	\$560,000	-1.8%	San Diego	\$1,054,180	\$1,025,000	+2.8%
Nevada	\$625,000	\$560,000	+11.6%	Butte	\$475,900	\$442,000	+7.7%
				Yuba	\$446,750	\$449,950	-0.7%

For Complete Report & All California Counties:
<http://www.givingback4homes.com/newsletter.html> *revised

CALIFORNIA HOME SALES: JULY 2024

State/Region/County	July 2024	June 2024	MTM% Chg	State/Region/County	July 2024	June 2024	MTM% Chg
Calif. State Average	\$886,560	\$900,720	-1.6%	Solano	\$586,400	\$601,250	-2.5%
Calif. Condo Average	\$680,000	\$697,000	-2.4%	Contra-Costa	\$916,500	\$903,000	+1.5%
Sacramento	\$560,000	\$560,000	+0.0%	San Francisco	\$1,600,000	\$1,650,000	-3.0%
Placer	\$670,000	\$685,000	-2.2%	Fresno	\$420,000	\$428,890	-2.1%
El Dorado	\$695,000	\$709,000	-2.0%	Santa Clara	\$1,880,000	\$1,955,000	-3.8%
Yolo	\$610,000	\$649,500	-6.1%	Orange County	\$1,390,000	\$1,450,000	-4.1%
Stanislaus	\$485,000	\$495,000	-2.0%	Los Angeles	\$909,010	\$889,180	+2.2%
San Joaquin	\$585,000	\$550,000	+6.4%	San Diego	\$1,020,000	\$1,054,180	-3.2%
Nevada	\$609,480	\$625,000	-2.5%	Butte	\$430,000	\$475,900	-9.6%
				Yuba	\$438,400	\$446,750	-1.9%

For Complete Report & All California Counties:
<http://www.givingback4homes.com/newsletter.html> *revised



AUGUST



WISHING A HAPPY BIRTHDAY & HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO THE FOLLOWING:

GLENN B.	LIZ E.	ZAC D.	KATI M.
MICHAEL N.	MELVIN G.	PAM E.	KASSI M.
LISA S.	DARYL & LIZA L.	MELVIN & WELLA G.	ALEX S.
	ZANE & SALLY M.	KEVIN & SUSAN J.	



SEPTEMBER



WISHING A HAPPY BIRTHDAY & HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO THE FOLLOWING:

BECKY H.	ZANE M.	SABRINA R.	SANDRA S.
RIALYN J.	TOM M.	DANIELLE O.	YASSY W.
TAMMY G.	BRYNNE C.	KATIE P.	LUCY L.
SHELBY G.	ADRIENNE M.	LISA C.	GRACE P.
SCOTT T.	DANIELLE O. & MATTHEW F.	JOSH & ALEXANDRIA S.	KARINA F.
PAUL & HEATHER M.	LORI & DAVID B.	KATE & RYAN S.	OCTAVIO & SABRINA R.

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- 1st Prize** \$50 Food & Laugh's Gift Card
- 2nd Prize** \$25 Petsmart Gift Card
- 3rd Prize** \$10 Home Depot Gift Card

JULY WINNERS

- 1st Prize** \$50 Nike Gift Card-Lucy L.
- 2nd Prize** \$25 Red Robin Gift Card-Paul M.
- 3rd Prize** \$10 Amazon Gift Card-Phil L.

Drawing Disclaimer Available Online.



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