US Housing Market Weekly
July 21, 2023

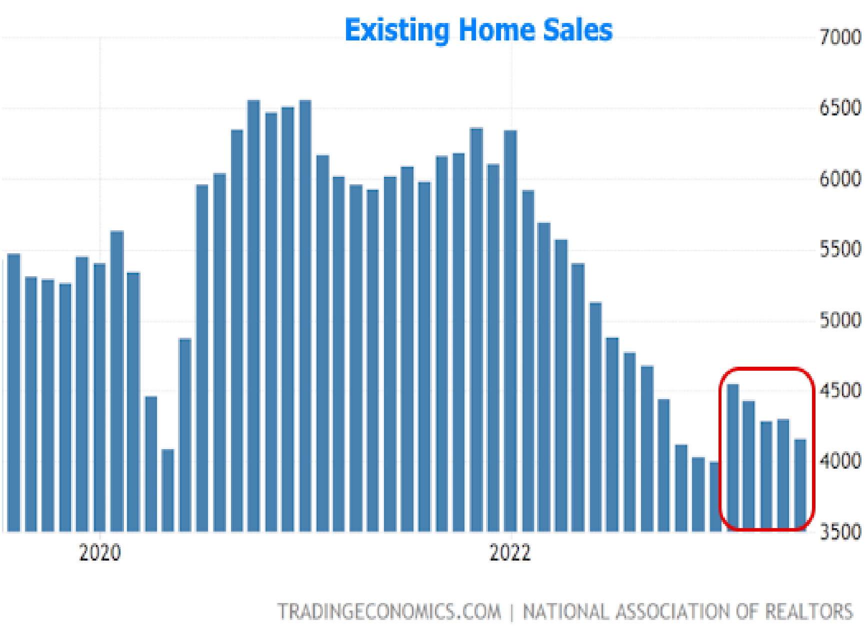
David Hanks
Broker/Owner, American Broker Services, Inc. dba Quality Choice Funding
NMLS # 352844
2675 Twin Creeks Drive San Ramon, CA 94583
Mobile: 925.382.2502
Fax: 928.873.4055
dave@qualitychoicefunding.com
View My Website

Slow Housing Market's Questionable Excuse (And a Much Better Alternative)

Inventory! That's been a buzzword for the housing market for more than a decade, but it's been especially prevalent in 2023 as the excuse for slower home sales. How good of an excuse is it?

Before digging into that question, let's take a look at the data that needs to have excuses made for it. This week brought the monthly release of Existing Home Sales from the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

Existing sales began the year with a pop, but have consistently been fading since then.



The chart above captures all-time highs and 12-year lows all in the space of few years (thanks Covid).

National Average Mortgage Rates

	Rate	Change	Points
Mortgage News Daily			
30 Yr. Fixed	7.09%	+0.07	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.56%	+0.03	0.00
30 Yr. FHA	6.62%	+0.07	0.00
30 Yr. Jumbo	7.35%	+0.04	0.00
5/1 ARM	7.30%	+0.06	0.00
Freddie Mac			
30 Yr. Fixed	7.02%	-0.42	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.28%	-0.48	0.00

Rates as of: 5/17

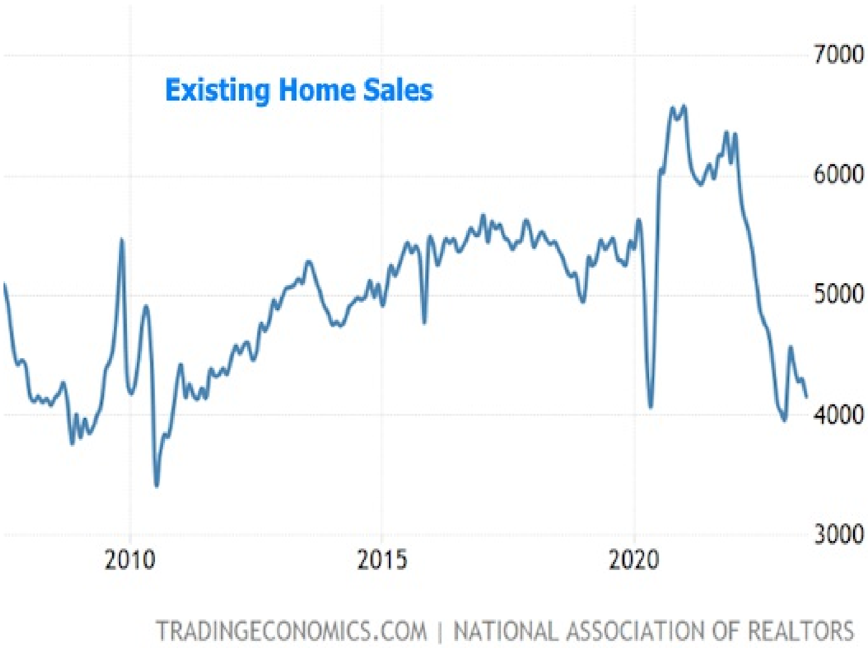
Market Data

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 6.0	100.40	-0.15
MBS GNMA 6.0	100.78	+0.04
10 YR Treasury	4.4223	+0.0454
30 YR Treasury	4.5610	+0.0549

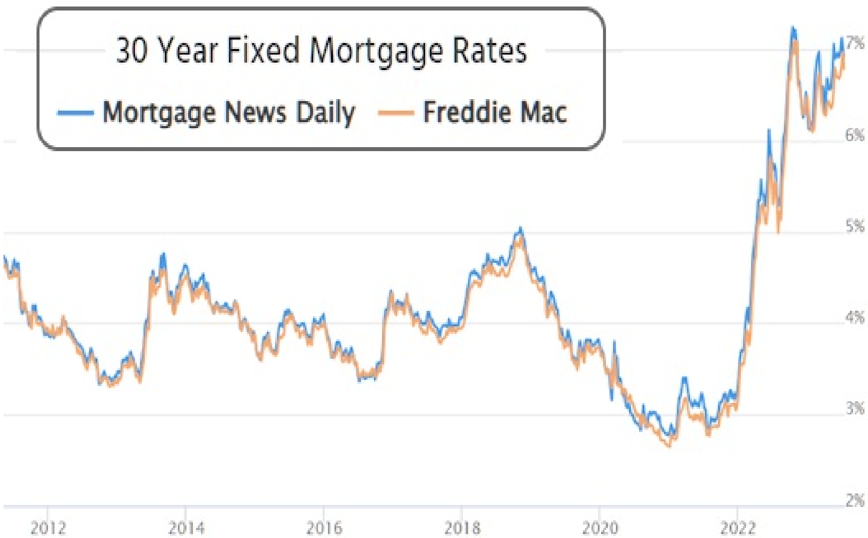
Pricing as of: 5/17 5:59PM EST

Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	May 15	198.1	+0.51%
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%



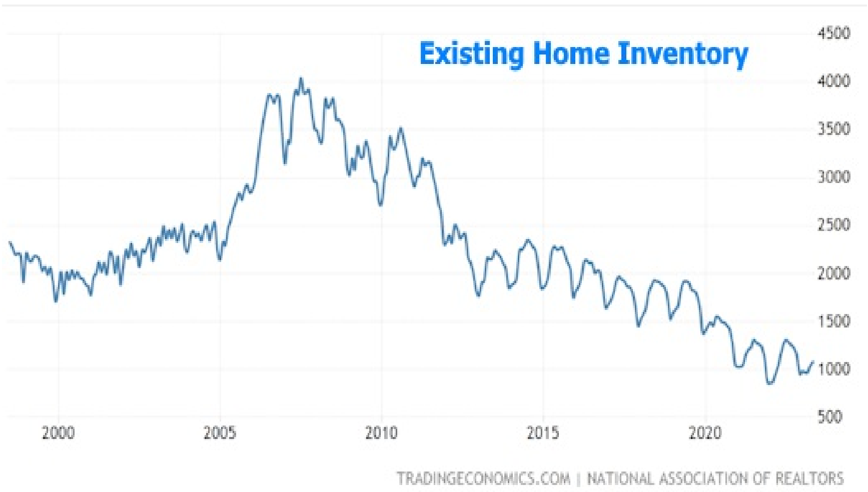
When it comes to explaining the slump, the National Association of Realtors places INVENTORY at the top of the list. And while no one should disagree that more inventory would result in more home sales, perhaps we're overlooking the bigger issue: RATES.



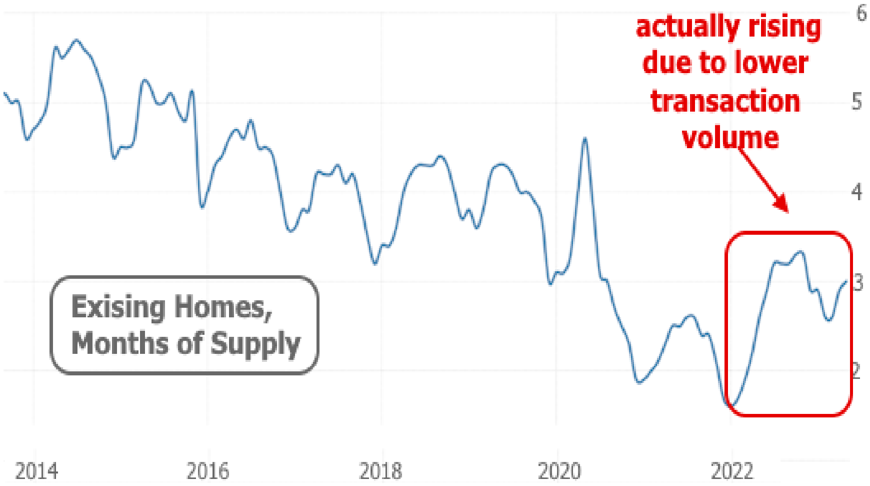
In the NAR's defense, they're quite aware that rates are a problem. But the recent hyperfocus on inventory might be overdone. After all, wouldn't many more homeowners consider moving up if they weren't faced with the prospect of giving up their 3% mortgage in exchange for something closer to 7%?

"There are simply not enough homes for sale," according to NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun. "The market can easily absorb a doubling of inventory."

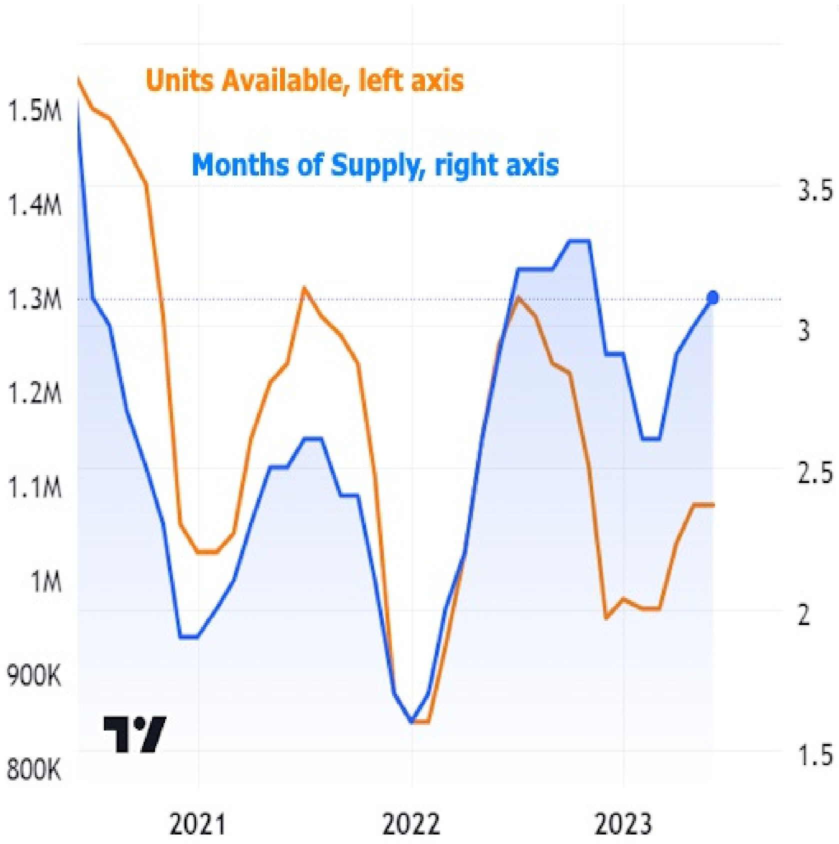
To be sure, more inventory would be a good thing in almost every regard. A doubling of inventory would likely keep prices in check or push them slightly lower, but it might not conjure up as much buying demand as you might assume. Two separate stats in the Existing Home Sales data illustrate the point. The first is for inventory in terms of UNITS.



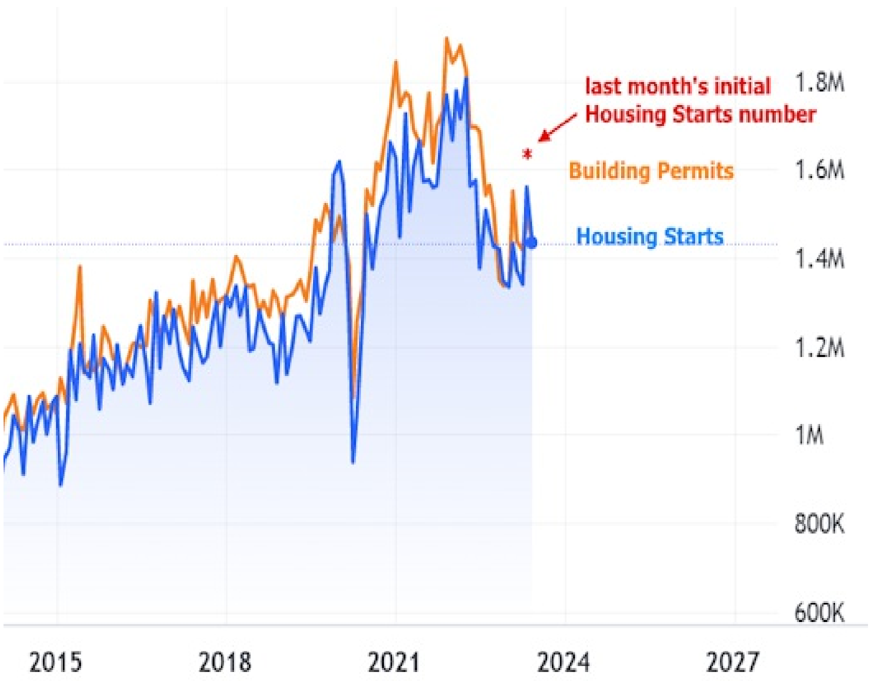
This chart makes it seem as if inventory is in line with all time lows and not building as quickly as it normally does at this time of year. But the takeaway changes a bit when we look at inventory in terms of "months of supply."



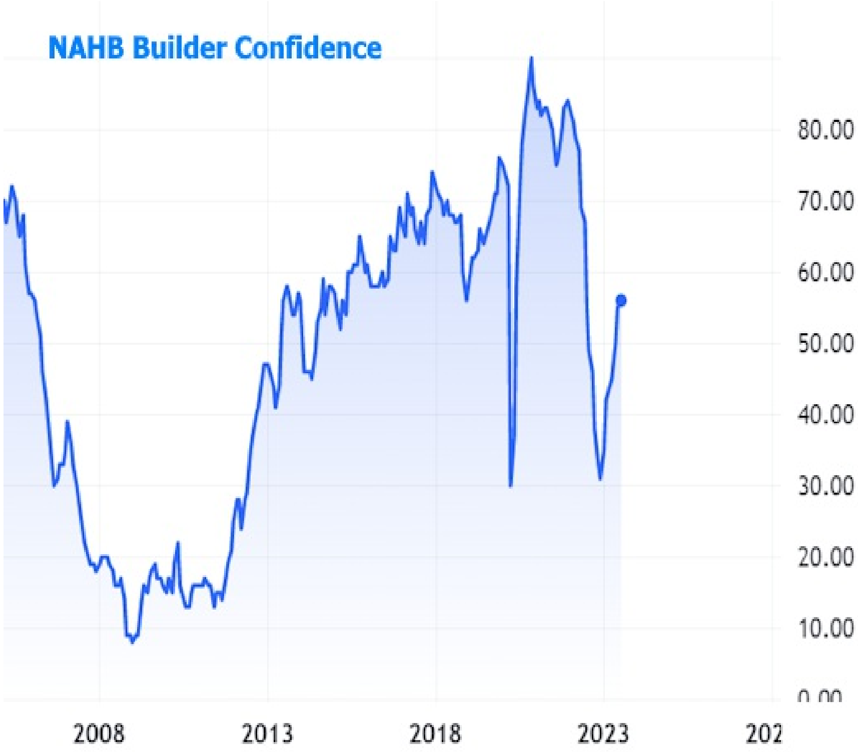
Since it's not incredibly easy to quickly glean the takeaway from the two charts above, here you go: in terms of units, inventory is nowhere near mid-2020 levels while "months of supply" is well above. Let's zoom in:



In separate data released this week, we saw more evidence of moderation on the demand side of the home sales equation. Housing Starts (the ground-breaking phase of new construction) were revised much lower after last month's surge and the current month's data came in just below forecasts. Without a doubt, the construction side of the market is doing much better than the resale side relative to pre-covid levels, but it's also only about a quarter of the market.



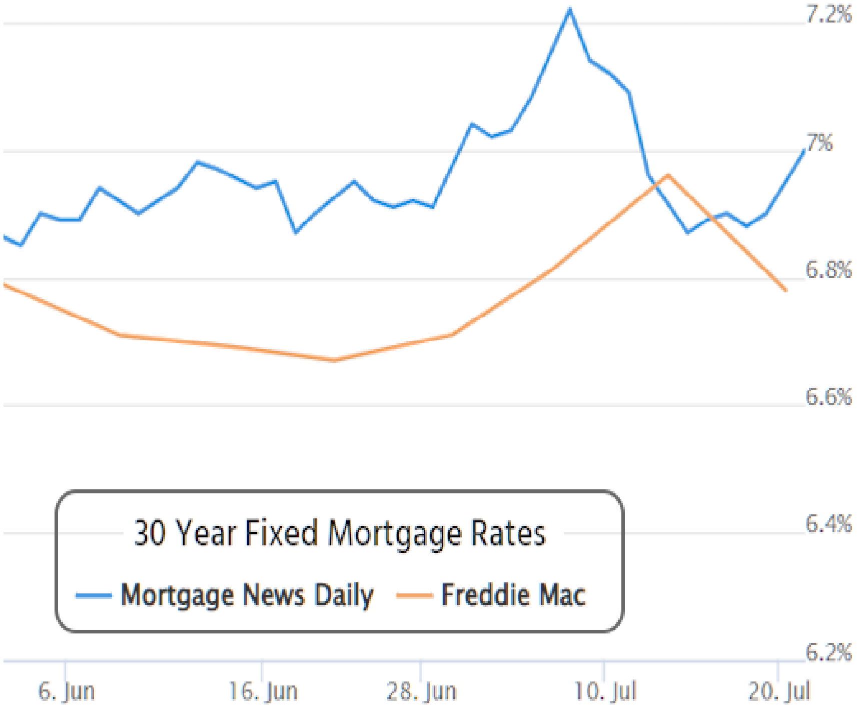
Nonetheless, homebuilders remain more optimistic than they were at the beginning of the year according to other data out this week from the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).



If high rates are a root cause of the housing market issue (and no, we're not ignoring the fact that low rates served as a sort of root cause in 2020-2022, acting to pull forward a significant amount of home sales volume), what's the root cause of high rates and what will it take for things to change?

As we discussed last week, it's almost all about inflation. Last week's friendlier CPI data helped rates move sharply lower. But this week's labor market data pushed back in the other direction. The following chart of 10yr Treasury yields shows the relative movement in the rates market.

Mortgage rates tend to follow a similar path to 10yr yields over time, so it's no surprise to see mortgages a bit higher versus last week with the average top tier 30yr fixed rate back around 7%. Freddie Mac's index covers the 5 weekdays leading up to Wednesday on any given week. During that time last week, rates were indeed much higher than the 5 days leading up to this past Wednesday.



In other words, Freddie's survey hasn't caught up to reality yet. It also runs a bit lower on average because it doesn't adjust for upfront costs whereas Mortgage News Daily does. That means a quote of 6.625% with 1% discount paid upfront would be recorded as 6.625% by Freddie, whereas the rate with no discount points would be closer to 7.125%.

Rates will receive their next big dose of information next week when the Fed announces its latest rate hike. The market already knows the hike is coming, so that part won't be a market mover. Rather, traders will tune in to hear what Powell has to say about how the outlook may be changing in light of recent progress on inflation. There's a chance the market comes away from next week's Fed hike with the sense that it was the last hike in a long time. Of course there's also a chance that Powell is concerned about market exuberance and thus doubles down on the higher rate narrative. There's no way to know which direction rates will go on Wednesday, only that the risk of volatility is bigger than normal.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Monday, Jul 17				
8:30AM	Jul NY Fed Manufacturing	1.1	-4.3	6.6
Tuesday, Jul 18				
8:30AM	Jun Retail Sales (%)	0.2%	0.5%	0.5%
9:15AM	Jun Industrial Production (%)	-0.5%	0%	-0.5%
10:00AM	May Business Inventories (%)	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
10:00AM	Jul NAHB housing market indx	56	56	55
Wednesday, Jul 19				
7:00AM	Jul/14 MBA Refi Index	446.4		416
7:00AM	Jul/14 MBA Purchase Index	163.2		165.3
8:30AM	Jun Housing starts number mm (ml)	1.434M	1.48M	1.559M
8:30AM	Jun Building permits: number (ml)	1.44M	1.49M	1.496M
8:30AM	Jun House starts mm: change (%)	-8%		15.7%
8:30AM	Jun Build permits: change mm (%)	-3.7%		5.6%
Thursday, Jul 20				
8:30AM	Jul/15 Jobless Claims (k)	228K	242K	237K
8:30AM	Jul Philly Fed Business Index	-13.5	-10	-13.7
10:00AM	Jun Existing home sales (ml)	4.16M	4.2M	4.3M
10:00AM	Jun Exist. home sales % chg (%)	-3.3%		0.2%
Monday, Jul 24				
9:45AM	Jul S&P Global Composite PMI	52		53.2
Tuesday, Jul 25				
9:00AM	May FHFA Home Price Index m/m (%)	0.7%	0.2%	0.7%
9:00AM	May Case Shiller Home Prices-20 y/y (%)	-1.7%	-2.2%	-1.7%
9:00AM	May FHFA Home Prices y/y (%)	2.8%	2.6%	3.1%
Wednesday, Jul 26				

Event Importance:

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

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
7:00AM	Jul/21 MBA Purchase Index	159.2		163.2
7:00AM	Jul/21 MBA Refi Index	444.5		446.4
10:00AM	Jun New Home Sales (%) (%)	-2.5%		6.6%
10:00AM	Jun New Home Sales (ml)	0.697M	0.725M	0.715M
2:00PM	Fed Interest Rate Decision	5.5%	5.5%	5.25%
2:30PM	Fed Press Conference			
Thursday, Jul 27				
8:30AM	Jul/22 Jobless Claims (k)	221K	235K	228K
8:30AM	Jun Durable goods (%)	4.7%	1%	2%
8:30AM	Q2 GDP Advance (%)	2.4%	1.8%	2%
Friday, Jul 28				
8:30AM	Jun Core PCE Inflation (y/y) (%)	4.1%	4.2%	4.6%
8:30AM	Jun Core PCE (m/m) (%)	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%
8:30AM	Q2 Employment costs (%)			1.2%
10:00AM	Jul Consumer Sentiment (ip)			
10:00AM	Jul U Mich conditions	76.6	77.5	69

Listen, Analyze, Solve

David started in the mortgage industry in 2001 and has kept the same philosophy from day one: "Keep the client's best interest at the forefront of every transaction." What works for one client will not necessarily work for the next. David first listens, then evaluates and finally researches options making sure all possibilities have been considered. Once the proper path is determined, David works to make the process as quick and painless as possible, providing excellent service and communicating every step along the way.

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