# Hello NEIGHBOR!

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It's Jewell Michael, your local Realtor ®. In my continued effort to provide relevant, useful information to the residents of Barrow County, I wanted to share this market update with you.

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| Competitive Market | Median Sell Price of Homes $366.4K | Average Days on Market 46 | Homes Sold in June Barrow County 174 |

**Interest Rates:** Rates are holding relatively steady this week, though the bond market that drives them has been drifting slightly in the wrong direction. This week is a reminder that when rates move, they rarely announce their plans.

**Economic Update:** The Federal Reserve's new chair has brought in outside experts to rethink how the Fed operates, including how it handles emerging topics like artificial intelligence, so expect the Fed to stay in the headlines. Closer to home, sales slowed a bit last month while prices still managed to hit a new record, and the job market remains steady.

**Mortgages:** The mortgage market is taking a breather, and plenty of buyers are doing the same. Sales dipped last month, yet the typical sale price still hit a new high. That combination tells a story, the demand is there, it's just waiting on the sidelines. Let me help you get prepared so you, the buyer, can move quickly when the right home appears.

I'm offering all recipients of this letter a 100% FREE Comparative Market Analysis to show you what you could possibly get for your property.

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**What The End of the SAVE Plan Means**

*Buyers Pre-Approvals May Feel It*

More than 7.5 million student loan borrowers just lost their repayment plan, and some of them are in your database right now. When their new monthly payments kick in, pre-approvals, budgets, and closing timelines can all feel the ripple. Here's what changed and what it means for you, the buyer.

The SAVE repayment plan, a Biden-era program that lowered monthly payments for millions of borrowers, officially ended July 1, 2026. Loan servicers are notifying enrollees in waves between now and early 2027, and each borrower gets 90 days from their own notice to choose a new repayment plan, or one will be chosen for them.

Here's why that matters for you. Debt-to-income ratio, or DTI, is a major factor in pre-approval, and it uses the required minimum monthly student loan payment, not the total balance. When a borrower's new plan kicks in, that minimum payment can jump, and buying power can shift even if nothing else about their finances changed. Here are a few scenarios worth watching.

- Pre-approved buyers still shopping. If your student loan payment goes up, the amount you can borrow may go down. It's better to find that out now than after you've found a home you love.

- Buyers under contract. Lenders double-check debts right before closing. If a new loan payment pops up at that stage, it can usually be handled, but only if your agent and lender know about it early.

- Buyers who are still on the fence. Some will hear this news and assume buying a home is now out of reach. Not necessarily. Choosing the right repayment plan can keep your numbers in a range that still works.

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**Down Payments Just Hit a 5-Year Low**

*The Cash Needed To Get In The Door Is Shrinking*

If a ever as a buyer ever told me you were giving up because you couldn't save a big enough down payment, here’s why I’ll talk you off the ledge. New Realtor.com data shows the typical buyer put down about $23,400 in early 2026. That's roughly $5,000 less than a year ago, a 19% drop, and the lowest since 2021.

So why are buyers putting less down?

- Less competition. Bidding wars have mostly cooled off, so buyers no longer need a giant down payment just to stand out.
- More moderate prices. A down payment is a percentage of the purchase price, so as price growth cools, the cash needed to get in the door shrinks too.
- Low down payment loans are having a moment. Per Realtor.com, FHA loans have topped 24% of purchase mortgages for five straight quarters, and VA loans recently hit their highest share in more than a decade. Both programs allow buyers to put little to no money down.

Of course, even a smaller down payment is a real chunk of cash. So where does it come from? For many buyers, the answer starts with down payment assistance, possibly the most overlooked tool in the toolbox. Urban Institute and Down Payment Resource found nearly 44% of recent buyers in the 10 largest U.S. metros qualified for assistance. However, only about 10% of them actually used it. Many programs aren't limited to first-time buyers or lower incomes either, so don't let rule yourself out.

Family support is growing too. Veterans United found about 59% of parents have provided or plan to provide help toward their child's home purchase, most often with the down payment. Just remember that gift funds come with documentation rules, so the earlier your lender knows family money is in the mix, the smoother closing goes.

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**How To Run an Honest Mid-Year Review With Claude**
*Build a Plan You'll Actually Stick To*

*Remember those goals you set back in January? July is the perfect moment for a brutally honest mid-year review. Done right, it tells you how the first half really went, where you want to be by New Year's, and what weekly actions will keep you moving when motivation dips. Claude makes this surprisingly easy. Here's the playbook.*

💡**Step 1: Reflect**
Take an honest look at the last six months. Not just the closings, but the deals that fell apart and the leads that went cold. Paste this in:
You're my thinking partner for a mid-year business review. Get the honest answers out of me, not the comfortable ones. Interview me one question at a time about what went well in my real estate business over the last 6 months, what didn't, what I learned, and what would make the next 6 months a success. When my answer is vague, push for the specific thing underneath. Don't reassure me. At the end, summarize it as a short, honest reflection.

💡**Step 2: Turn it into goals**
Clarity is lovely, but it's not a plan. "Grow my business" is a vibe. "Take 2 listings a month" is a goal. Paste this next:
You're my high-performance business coach. Be direct, not a cheerleader. Here's my reflection: [paste from Step 1] Pressure-test each goal I share. Is it actually mine? Is it measurable? Is it realistic in 6 months? Rewrite the keepers with a clear target, then suggest 3-5 goals I might be missing. I'll pick which ones make the cut.

💡**Step 3: Pick 3 and build the system**
This is the step nearly everyone skips. Plan the next 12 weeks, not the whole year, so every week counts. Then commit to weekly actions you control. You can't "close 15 transactions" on demand, but you can make 25 sphere calls a week. Ask Claude to help you pick 3 focus goals plus 1-2 weekly actions for each.

💡**Step 4: Review weekly**
Once a week, in the same chat:
It's my weekly review. Ask me, one at a time: what I did this week toward my 3 focus goals, what moved, what slipped. Pressure-test my one change for next week. Is it the real lever, or the easy answer?