



VOL. Q4
OCTOBER 2026

100 Beard Sawmill Rd, Suite 275
Shelton, CT 06484

THE ROCK SOLID QUARTERLY

BUILDING YOUR ROCK SOLID FINANCIAL HOUSE, ONE QUARTER AT A TIME

THIS QUARTER'S LEAD

Rates went up. The market narrowed. Time to check your foundation.

The Fed raised rates for the first time since 2023, a handful of companies carried the stock market, and 2026 is the first full tax year under the new deduction rules. Here's what that means for your financial house, and what to finish before December 31.

FROM THE ADVISING TEAM'S DESK

Every fourth quarter we ask one question for each client: what can we still do before December 31 that we can't do after?

This year the list is longer. Higher rates, a lopsided market and new deductions all reward planning ahead.

None of that calls for panic. It calls for a plan built on a rock solid foundation.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

02

The Rate Hike That Changed the Math

Cash, bonds, borrowing and income, plus Q3's lopsided market.

03

Your Year-End Tax-Smart Checklist

RMDs, Roth conversions, QCDs and the new rules.

04

Medicare, Social Security & Next Steps

Open enrollment, the COLA and the IRMAA lookback.

KEY DATES THIS QUARTER

OCT 14

2027 Social Security
COLA announced

OCT 15

Medicare open
enrollment begins

DEC 7

Medicare open
enrollment ends

DEC 31

RMDs, Roth conversions
& QCDs due

The Rate Hike That Changed the Math

On September 16, the Federal Reserve voted unanimously to raise its benchmark rate by a quarter point, its first increase since 2023, citing inflation that remains elevated. After years of expecting cuts, retirees now face a different set of trade-offs.

FED FUNDS TARGET 3.75–4.00%	CHANGE · SEPT 16 +0.25%	NEXT DECISIONS Oct 28 · Dec 9
---------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	---

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR FINANCIAL HOUSE

Cash & CDs Savings, money market and new CD yields tend to follow the Fed. Make sure idle cash is actually earning.	Bonds Existing bond prices typically dip when rates rise, while new purchases lock in more income. A bond ladder lets maturing rungs reinvest at current rates.
Borrowing HELOCs, credit cards and other variable-rate debt now cost more. Revisit any plan that counted on cheap borrowing.	Guaranteed Income Rates influence the terms insurers can offer on fixed and fixed indexed annuities. If income certainty is part of your plan, it's worth a fresh look.

Q3 MARKET SNAPSHOT ≈ +2% S&P 500, third quarter ≈ +12% S&P 500, year to date	A rising index, but most stocks fell <table><tr><td>311 DECLINED</td><td>≈190 ROSE*</td></tr></table> S&P 500 COMPANIES, Q3 2026 (= 500 TOTAL) Four giants (Microsoft, Nvidia, Apple and Meta) did most of the lifting, so an index-tracking portfolio may now lean on them more than you intended. Year-end is a natural time to rebalance, ideally inside IRAs where trades aren't taxed. *Estimated: roughly 500 companies minus the 311 that declined. The exact count depends on index membership during the quarter, and some stocks may have been flat.	311 DECLINED	≈190 ROSE*
311 DECLINED	≈190 ROSE*		

03

Your Year-End Tax-Smart Checklist

Most of these close on December 31, and some can't be undone afterward. Start early: custodians get busy in December.

01

Take your required minimum distributions

At 73 or older, RMDs from IRAs and most workplace plans are due by Dec 31 (a first RMD can wait until April 1). A missed RMD can cost up to 25% of the shortfall.

02

Consider a Roth conversion

Moving dollars from tax-deferred to tax-free in a lower-bracket year can reduce lifetime taxes. It must finish by Dec 31 and can't be reversed, so model brackets and IRMAA first.

03

Give directly from your IRA

At 70½ or older, a qualified charitable distribution sends up to \$111,000 (2026 limit) straight to charity. It can count toward your RMD and stays out of your AGI.

04

Rethink how you give

Itemizers now deduct only gifts above 0.5% of AGI, so bunching gifts or using a donor-advised fund can help. Non-itemizers can deduct up to \$1,000 (\$2,000 joint) of cash gifts to qualifying charities.

05

Harvest losses, and maybe gains

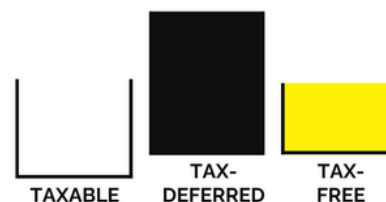
Use losses in taxable accounts to offset gains. In the 0% capital gains bracket, you may be able to realize gains tax-free and reset your cost basis.

06

Finish your 2026 contributions

The 2026 401(k) limit is \$24,500, plus catch-up at 50+. New this year: if your 2025 wages topped \$150,000, catch-up dollars must go in as Roth.

YOUR THREE TAX BUCKETS



ROTH CONVERSION →

Shifting deferred dollars to tax-free in low-bracket years gives you control over future taxable income.

NEW RULES · FIRST FULL YEAR

Senior deduction

Up to \$6,000 per person 65+ through 2028, itemizing or not. Phase-out begins above \$75,000 MAGI (\$150,000 joint).

Higher SALT cap

\$40,400 for 2026, reduced at higher incomes. With Connecticut property taxes, itemizing may be back on the table.

35% deduction cap

In the top 37% bracket, itemized deductions are now worth at most 35 cents per dollar.

04

Medicare, Social Security & the Income Ripple

MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT

Oct 15 – Dec 7

Drug and Advantage plans change their formularies, networks and costs every year. A quick review can save real money.

\$202.90

2026 standard Part B premium / month

≈ \$209.50

2027 projection; official figure due this fall

\$700

2027 max Part D deductible

\$2,400

2027 Part D out-of-pocket cap

2027 SOCIAL SECURITY COLA

Announced Oct 14

Independent forecasts put next year's raise between roughly 3.2% and 3.8%, above 2026's 2.8%. Remember that a higher Part B premium comes out of that raise first.



IRMAA · THE TWO-YEAR LOOKBACK

Medicare surcharges are set from your tax return two years earlier. A large conversion or sale this year can raise premiums in 2028.

2026
INCOME YOU REPORT

2 YEARS

2028
MEDICARE PREMIUMS

YOUR NEXT STEP

Book your Rock Solid Financial House Strategy Session

We'll walk through your RMDs, Roth conversion window, giving plan and 2027 income, and map each to the right tax bucket before December 31.

CALL OR VISIT

203-372-4442

www.strategies4wm.com

Investment advisory services offered through Stone Wall Money Management, LLC, a Connecticut-registered investment adviser. Insurance products and services offered through Strategies for Retirement, LLC. This newsletter is for general information only and is not tax, legal or individualized investment advice; consult your tax professional about your situation. Figures are current or projected as of October 6, 2026 and may change; 2027 figures marked as estimates or projections await official announcements. Past performance does not guarantee future results. Investing involves risk, including possible loss of principal. Annuity guarantees are backed by the claims-paying ability of the issuing insurer.