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## SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Release No. 34-86997; File No. SR-NASDAQ-2019-071]

### **Self-Regulatory Organizations; The Nasdaq Stock Market LLC; Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of Proposed Rule Change to Amend Equity 7, Section 118(a)**

September 17, 2019.

Pursuant to Section 19(b)(1) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (“Act”)<sup>1</sup>, and Rule 19b-4 thereunder,<sup>2</sup> notice is hereby given that on September 3, 2019, The Nasdaq Stock Market LLC (“Nasdaq” or “Exchange”) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC” or “Commission”) the proposed rule change as described in Items I, II, and III, below, which Items have been prepared by the Exchange. The Commission is publishing this notice to solicit comments on the proposed rule change from interested persons.

#### **I. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Terms of Substance of the Proposed Rule Change**

The Exchange proposes to amend Equity 7, Sections 118(a)(1), (2) and (3) to add a new credit under each of these rules for non-displayed orders (other than Supplemental Orders) that provide liquidity.

The text of the proposed rule change is available on the Exchange’s Website at <http://nasdaq.cchwallstreet.com/>, at the principal office of the Exchange, and at the Commission’s Public Reference Room.

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<sup>1</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(1).

<sup>2</sup> 17 CFR 240.19b-4.

II. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

In its filing with the Commission, the Exchange included statements concerning the purpose of and basis for the proposed rule change and discussed any comments it received on the proposed rule change. The text of these statements may be examined at the places specified in Item IV below. The Exchange has prepared summaries, set forth in sections A, B, and C below, of the most significant aspects of such statements.

A. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

1. Purpose

The purpose of the proposed rule change is to amend Equity 7, Sections 118(a)(1), (2) and (3) to add a new credit under each of these rules for non-displayed orders (other than Supplemental Orders) that provide liquidity. Equity 7, Section 118(a) provides the fees assessed and credits provided for the use of the order execution and routing services of the Nasdaq Market Center by members for all securities priced at \$1 or more that it trades. The Exchange is proposing to adopt a credit of \$0.0010 per share executed applicable to Nasdaq-listed securities ("Tape C") under paragraph (a)(1) of the rule, and credits of \$0.0015 per share executed applicable to securities listed on NYSE ("Tape A") and securities listed on exchanges other than Nasdaq and NYSE ("Tape B") under paragraphs (a)(2) and (a)(3) of the rule, respectively. To qualify for each of these credits a member must provide 0.10% or more of Consolidated Volume<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The term "Consolidated Volume" means the total consolidated volume reported to all consolidated transaction reporting plans by all exchanges and trade reporting facilities during a month in equity securities, excluding executed orders with a size of less than one round lot. For purposes of calculating Consolidated Volume and the extent of a member's trading activity the date of the annual reconstitution of the Russell Investments Indexes shall be excluded from both total Consolidated Volume and the member's trading activity. See Equity 7, Section 118(a).

through non-displayed orders (other than midpoint orders), and provide 0.15% or more of Consolidated Volume through midpoint orders during the month. The proposed credits are provided to qualifying members for non-displayed orders not otherwise covered by the lists of credits provided for non-displayed orders (other than Supplemental Orders) that provide liquidity under each of the respective paragraphs of Equity 7, Section 118(a).

## 2. Statutory Basis

The Exchange believes that its proposal is consistent with Section 6(b) of the Act,<sup>4</sup> in general, and furthers the objectives of Sections 6(b)(4) and 6(b)(5) of the Act,<sup>5</sup> in particular, in that it provides for the equitable allocation of reasonable dues, fees and other charges among members and issuers and other persons using any facility, and is not designed to permit unfair discrimination between customers, issuers, brokers, or dealers.

### The Proposal is Reasonable

The Exchange's proposed change to its schedule of credits and charges is reasonable in several respects. As a threshold matter, the Exchange is subject to significant competitive forces in the market for equity securities transaction services that constrain its pricing determinations in that market. The fact that this market is competitive has long been recognized by the courts. In NetCoalition v. Securities and Exchange Commission, the D.C. Circuit stated as follows: "[n]o one disputes that competition for order flow is 'fierce.' ... As the SEC explained, '[i]n the U.S. national market system, buyers and sellers of securities, and the broker-dealers that act as their order-routing agents, have a wide range of choices of where to route orders for execution'; [and] 'no exchange can afford to take its market share percentages for granted' because 'no exchange

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<sup>4</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78f(b).

<sup>5</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78f(b)(4) and (5).

possesses a monopoly, regulatory or otherwise, in the execution of order flow from broker dealers' ....”<sup>6</sup>

The Commission and the courts have repeatedly expressed their preference for competition over regulatory intervention in determining prices, products, and services in the securities markets. In Regulation NMS, while adopting a series of steps to improve the current market model, the Commission highlighted the importance of market forces in determining prices and SRO revenues and, also, recognized that current regulation of the market system “has been remarkably successful in promoting market competition in its broader forms that are most important to investors and listed companies.”<sup>7</sup>

Numerous indicia demonstrate the competitive nature of this market. For example, clear substitutes to the Exchange exist in the market for equity security transaction services. The Exchange is only one of several equity venues to which market participants may direct their order flow. Competing equity exchanges offer similar tiered pricing structures to that of the Exchange, including schedules of rebates and fees that apply based upon members achieving certain volume thresholds.<sup>8</sup>

Within this environment, market participants can freely and often do shift their order flow among the Exchange and competing venues in response to changes in their respective pricing

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<sup>6</sup> NetCoalition v. SEC, 615 F.3d 525, 539 (D.C. Cir. 2010) (quoting Securities Exchange Act Release No. 59039 (December 2, 2008), 73 FR 74770, 74782-83 (December 9, 2008) (SR-NYSEArca-2006-21)).

<sup>7</sup> Securities Exchange Act Release No. 51808 (June 9, 2005), 70 FR 37496, 37499 (June 29, 2005) (“Regulation NMS Adopting Release”).

<sup>8</sup> CBOE BZX provides a rebate of \$0.0015 per share executed for non-displayed orders that add liquidity in the securities of any tape. See Cboe BZX U.S. Equities Exchange Fee Schedule, available at [https://markets.cboe.com/us/equities/membership/fee\\_schedule/bzx/](https://markets.cboe.com/us/equities/membership/fee_schedule/bzx/).

schedules.<sup>9</sup> Within the foregoing context, the proposal represents a reasonable attempt by the Exchange to increase its liquidity and market share relative to its competitors.

Generally, the Exchange's proposed schedule of credits and charges Equity 7, Section 118(a) provide increased overall incentives to members to increase their liquidity provision activity on the Exchange, and to do so broadly in orders in securities in all Tapes. An increase in overall liquidity provision activity on the Exchange will, in turn, improve the quality of the Exchange's equity market and increase its attractiveness to existing and prospective participants. The proposed new credits are consistent with the current design of Equity 7, Section 118(a) because it provides incrementally increased incentives in return for increased liquidity provision in non-displayed orders. Moreover, the proposed credits will be comparable to, if not favorable to, those that its competitors provide.<sup>10</sup>

#### The Proposal is an Equitable Allocation of Credits

The Exchange believes its proposal will allocate its proposed credits fairly among its market participants. The proposal will provide a member with an opportunity to earn a higher credit for its non-displayed orders above the current credits provided to members that provide 0.03% or more of Consolidated Volume during the month through midpoint orders or other non-displayed orders, which are \$0.0005 per share executed for Tape C securities and \$0.0010 per share executed for Tape A and B securities. Like these current credits, the proposed credits for Tape A and B securities are higher than the proposed credits for Tape C securities. This is

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<sup>9</sup> The Exchange perceives no regulatory, structural, or cost impediments to market participants shifting order flow away from it. In particular, the Exchange notes that such shifts in liquidity and market share occur within the context of market participants' existing duties of Best Execution and obligations under the Order Protection Rule under Regulation NMS.

<sup>10</sup> See n. 8, supra.

reflective of the Exchange's desire to increase market share in Tape A and B securities, which is lower in comparison to market share in Tape C securities.

Moreover, it is equitable for the Exchange to increase its overall credits to participants whose orders provide liquidity to the Exchange as a means of incentivizing increased liquidity provision activity and to do so broadly in orders in securities in all Tapes. An increase in overall liquidity provision activity on the Exchange will improve the quality of the Exchange's equity market and increase its attractiveness to existing and prospective participants.

#### The Proposal is not Unfairly Discriminatory

The Exchange believes that the proposal is not unfairly discriminatory. As an initial matter, the Exchange believes that nothing about its volume-based tiered pricing model is inherently unfair; instead, it is a rational pricing model that is well-established and ubiquitous in today's economy among firms in various industries – from co-branded credit cards to grocery stores to cellular telephone data plans – that use it to reward the loyalty of their best customers that provide high levels of business activity and incent other customers to increase the extent of their business activity. It is also a pricing model that the Exchange and its competitors have long employed with the assent of the Commission. It is fair because it incentivizes customer activity that increases liquidity, enhances price discovery, and improves the overall quality of the equity markets.

The Exchange intends for the proposal to improve market quality for all members on the Exchange and by extension attract more liquidity to the market, improving market wide quality and price discovery. Although net providers of liquidity will benefit most from the proposed credits, this result is fair insofar as increased liquidity provision activity will help to improve

market quality and the attractiveness of the Exchange's equity market to all existing and prospective participants.

B. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Burden on Competition

The Exchange does not believe that the proposed rule change will impose any burden on competition not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act.

Intramarket Competition

The Exchange does not believe that its proposal will place any category of Exchange participant at a competitive disadvantage. As noted above, all members of the Exchange will benefit from an increase in the provision of liquidity by those that choose to meet the tier qualification criteria. Members may grow their businesses so that they have the capacity to receive the higher credits. Moreover, members are free to trade on other venues to the extent they believe that the fees assessed and credits provided are not attractive. As one can observe by looking at any market share chart, price competition between exchanges is fierce, with liquidity and market share moving freely between exchanges in reaction to fee and credit changes. The Exchange notes that the tier structure is consistent with broker-dealer fee practices as well as the other industries, as described above.

Intermarket Competition

Addressing whether the proposed fee could impose a burden on competition on other SROs that is not necessary or appropriate, the Exchange believes that its proposed modifications to its schedule of credits and charges will not impose a burden on competition because the Exchange's execution services are completely voluntary and subject to extensive competition both from the other 12 live exchanges and from off-exchange venues, which include 32 alternative trading systems. The Exchange notes that it operates in a highly competitive market in which market participants can readily favor competing venues if they deem fee levels at a

particular venue to be excessive, or rebate opportunities available at other venues to be more favorable. In such an environment, the Exchange must continually adjust its fees to remain competitive with other exchanges and with alternative trading systems that have been exempted from compliance with the statutory standards applicable to exchanges. Because competitors are free to modify their own fees in response, and because market participants may readily adjust their order routing practices, the Exchange believes that the degree to which fee changes in this market may impose any burden on competition is extremely limited.

The proposed new credits are reflective of this competition because, even as one of the largest U.S. equities exchanges by volume, the Exchange only has approximately 18% market share, which in most markets could hardly be categorized as having enough market power to burden competition. Moreover, as noted above, price competition between exchanges is fierce, with liquidity and market share moving freely between exchanges in reaction to fee and credit changes. This is in addition to free flow of order flow to and among off-exchange venues which comprised more than 37% of industry volume for the month of July 2019.

In sum, the Exchange intends for the proposed credits to increase member incentives to provide liquidity in non-displayed Orders to the Exchange, which is reflective of fierce competition for order flow noted above; however, if the proposed credits are unattractive to market participants, it is likely that the Exchange will either fail to increase its market share or even lose market share as a result. Accordingly, the Exchange does not believe that the proposed new credits will impair the ability of members or competing order execution venues to maintain their competitive standing in the financial markets.

C. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Comments on the Proposed Rule Change Received from Members, Participants, or Others

No written comments were either solicited or received.

### III. Date of Effectiveness of the Proposed Rule Change and Timing for Commission Action

The foregoing rule change has become effective pursuant to Section 19(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act.<sup>11</sup>

At any time within 60 days of the filing of the proposed rule change, the Commission summarily may temporarily suspend such rule change if it appears to the Commission that such action is: (i) necessary or appropriate in the public interest; (ii) for the protection of investors; or (iii) otherwise in furtherance of the purposes of the Act. If the Commission takes such action, the Commission shall institute proceedings to determine whether the proposed rule should be approved or disapproved.

### IV. Solicitation of Comments

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views, and arguments concerning the foregoing, including whether the proposed rule change is consistent with the Act.

Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

#### Electronic Comments:

- Use the Commission's Internet comment form (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>); or
- Send an e-mail to [rule-comments@sec.gov](mailto:rule-comments@sec.gov). Please include File Number SR-NASDAQ-2019-071 on the subject line.

#### Paper Comments:

- Send paper comments in triplicate to Secretary, Securities and Exchange Commission, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549-1090.

All submissions should refer to File Number SR-NASDAQ-2019-071. This file number should be included on the subject line if e-mail is used. To help the Commission process and review

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<sup>11</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(3)(A)(ii).

your comments more efficiently, please use only one method. The Commission will post all comments on the Commission's Internet website (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>). Copies of the submission, all subsequent amendments, all written statements with respect to the proposed rule change that are filed with the Commission, and all written communications relating to the proposed rule change between the Commission and any person, other than those that may be withheld from the public in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552, will be available for website viewing and printing in the Commission's Public Reference Room, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549, on official business days between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Copies of the filing also will be available for inspection and copying at the principal office of the Exchange. All comments received will be posted without change. Persons submitting comments are cautioned that we do not redact or edit personal identifying information from comment submissions. You should submit only information that you wish to make available publicly. All submissions should refer to File Number SR-NASDAQ-2019-071 and should be submitted on or before **[INSERT DATE 21 DAYS FROM PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

For the Commission, by the Division of Trading and Markets, pursuant to delegated authority.<sup>12</sup>

**Jill M. Peterson,**

*Assistant Secretary.*

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<sup>12</sup> 17 CFR 200.30-3(a)(12).

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