

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION  
(Release No. 34-89878; File No. SR-NASDAQ-2020-057)

September 15, 2020

Self-Regulatory Organizations; The Nasdaq Stock Market LLC; Notice of Filing of Proposed Rule Change to Allow Companies to List in Connection with a Direct Listing with a Primary Offering In Which the Company Will Sell Shares Itself In the Opening Auction On the First Day of Trading on Nasdaq and to Explain How the Opening Transaction for Such a Listing Will be Effected

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 4, 2020, The Nasdaq Stock Market LLC (“Nasdaq” or the “Exchange”) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC” or “Commission”) the proposed rule change as described in Items I and II 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 allow companies to list in connection with a primary offering in which the company will sell shares itself in the opening auction on the first day of trading on Nasdaq and to explain how the opening transaction for such a listing will be effected.

The text of the proposed rule change is available on the Exchange’s Website at <https://listingcenter.nasdaq.com/rulebook/nasdaq/rules>, 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

Nasdaq proposes to (1) adopt Listing Rule IM-5315-2 to permit a company to list in connection with a primary offering in which the company will sell shares itself in the opening auction on the first day of trading on the Exchange (a “Direct Listing with a Capital Raise”)<sup>3</sup>; (2) amend Rule 4702 to add a new order type (the “Company Direct Listing Order”), which will be used during the Nasdaq Halt Cross for the shares offered by the company in a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise; and (3) amend Rules 4120(c)(9), 4573(a)(3) and 4753(b)(2) to establish requirements for disseminating information, establishing the opening price and initiating trading through the Nasdaq Halt Cross in a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise.

*Proposed Listing Rule IM-5315-2*

Listing Rule IM-5315-1 provides additional initial listing requirements for listing a company that has not previously had its common equity securities registered under the Act on

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<sup>3</sup> A Direct Listing with a Capital Raise includes situations where either: (i) only the company itself is selling shares in the opening auction on the first day of trading; or (ii) the company is selling shares and selling shareholders may also sell shares in such opening auction.

the Nasdaq Global Select Market at the time of effectiveness of a registration statement filed solely for the purpose of allowing existing shareholders to sell their shares (a “Direct Listing”). To allow a company to also sell shares on its own behalf in connection with its initial listing upon effectiveness of a registration statement, without a traditional underwritten public offering, the Exchange proposes to adopt Listing Rule IM-5315-2. This proposed rule would allow a company that has not previously had its common equity securities registered under the Act, to list its common equity securities on the Nasdaq Global Select Market at the time of effectiveness of a registration statement pursuant to which the company itself will sell shares in the opening auction on the first day of trading on the Exchange.

In considering the initial listing of a company in connection with a Direct Listing on the Nasdaq Global Select Market, Listing Rule IM-5315-1 currently provides that the Exchange will determine that such company has met the applicable Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares requirements based on the lesser of: (i) an independent third-party valuation of the company (a "Valuation");<sup>4</sup> and (ii) the most recent trading price for the company's common stock in a Private Placement Market where there has been sustained recent trading. For a security that has not had sustained recent trading in a Private Placement Market<sup>5</sup> prior to listing, Nasdaq will determine that such Company has met the Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares requirement if the Company satisfies the applicable Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares requirement and provides a Valuation evidencing a Market Value of Publicly Held Shares of at least \$250,000,000.

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<sup>4</sup> IM-5315-1 describes the requirement for a Valuation, including the experience and independence of the entity providing the Valuation.

<sup>5</sup> Nasdaq defines “Private Placement Market” in Listing Rule 5005(a)(34) as a trading system for unregistered securities operated by a national securities exchange or a registered broker-dealer.

In contrast, when applying this requirement to a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise, the Exchange and investors know the minimum price at which the company can sell shares in the offering, and therefore is proposing the following:

- Nasdaq will calculate the value of shares, including those being sold by the company and those held by public shareholders immediately prior to the listing, using a price per share equal to the price that is 20% below the lowest price in the price range disclosed by the issuer in its registration statement.<sup>6</sup> Nasdaq also will determine whether the company has met the applicable bid price and market capitalization requirements based on the same per share price.
- In determining whether the company satisfies the Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares for initial listing on the Nasdaq Global Select Market, the Exchange will deem such Company to have met the applicable requirement if the amount of the Company's Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares before the offering, along with the market value of the shares to be sold by the company in the Direct Listing with a Capital Raise is at least \$110 million (or \$100 million, if the Company has stockholders' equity of at least \$110 million).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As described below, the Nasdaq Halt Cross would not execute at a price that is more than 20% below the bottom of the disclosed range. Thus, this is the minimum price at which the company could list in connection with a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise.

<sup>7</sup> For example, if the company is selling five million shares in the opening auction and there are 45 million shares issued and outstanding immediately prior to the listing that are eligible for inclusion as unrestricted publicly-held shares based on disclosure in the company's registration statement, then the Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares will be calculated based on a combined total of 50 million shares. If the lowest price of the price range disclosed in the company's registration statement is \$10 per share, the Exchange will attribute to the company a Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares of \$400 million, based on a \$8 price per share, which is 20% below the bottom of the disclosed range (\$10).

Officers, directors or owners of more than 10% of the company's common stock prior to the opening auction may purchase shares sold by the company in the opening auction, provided that such purchases are not inconsistent with general anti-manipulation provisions, Regulation M, and other applicable securities laws. In addition, in the same way as for shares of a company listing following a traditional underwritten IPO, such an insider owner may purchase shares sold by other shareholders or sell its own shares in the opening auction and in trading after the opening auction, to the extent not inconsistent with general anti-manipulation provisions, Regulation M, and other applicable securities laws. Except as proposed for a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise, shares held by these types of inside investors are not included in calculations of Publicly Held Shares for purposes of Exchange listing rules.<sup>8</sup> The Exchange notes that such investors may acquire in secondary market trades shares sold by the issuer in a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise that were included when calculating whether the issuer meets the Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares requirement for initial listing. However, the Exchange notes that a company listing in conjunction with a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise will be required to have a Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares much higher than the Exchange's minimum \$45 million Market Value of Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares requirement for a traditional underwritten IPO. This heightened requirement, along with the ability of all investors to purchase shares in the opening process on the Exchange, should result in companies using a Direct Listing a Capital Raise having adequate public float and a liquid trading market after the completion of the opening auction.

Any company listing in connection with a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise would continue to be subject to, and required to meet, all other applicable initial listing requirements,

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<sup>8</sup> Rule 5005(a)(35).

including the requirements to have the applicable number of shareholders and at least 1,250,000 Unrestricted Publicly Held Shares outstanding at the time of initial listing, and the requirement to have a price per share of at least \$4.00 at the time of initial listing.<sup>9</sup>

Proposed Listing Rule IM-5315-2 also requires that securities listing in connection with a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise must begin trading on Nasdaq following the initial pricing through the Nasdaq Halt Cross, which is described in Rules 4120(c)(8) and 4753. To allow such initial pricing, the company must, in accordance with Rule 4120(c)(9), have a broker-dealer serving in the role of financial advisor to the issuer of the securities being listed, who is willing to perform the functions under Rule 4120(c)(8) that are performed by an underwriter with respect to an initial public offering.<sup>10</sup>

#### Amendment to Rule 4702

The Exchange proposes to amend Rule 4702 to add a new order type, the “Company Direct Listing Order” or “CDL Order”, which will be used for the company’s order in a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise. This will be a market order entered for the quantity of shares offered by the issuer, as disclosed in an effective registration statement for the offering that will execute at the price determined in the Nasdaq Halt Cross. A CDL Order may be entered only on behalf of the issuer and the CDL Order may not be cancelled or modified. Only one Nasdaq

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<sup>9</sup> See Listing Rules 5315(f)(1), (e)(1) and (2), respectively. Rule 5315(f)(1) requires a security to have: (A) at least 550 total holders and an average monthly trading volume over the prior 12 months of at least 1,100,000 shares per month; or (B) at least 2,200 total holders; or (C) a minimum of 450 round lot holders and at least 50% of such round lot holders must each hold unrestricted securities with a market value of at least \$2,500.

<sup>10</sup> As noted below, the Exchange also proposes to amend Rule 4120(c)(9) to specify that any services provided by such financial advisor to the issuer of a security, including a company listing in connection with a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise, must provide such services in a manner that is consistent with all federal securities laws, including Regulation M and other anti-manipulation requirements.

member, representing the issuer, may enter a CDL Order during a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise.

Under Nasdaq rules, a market order, such as the CDL Order, must be executed in full at the price determined in the Nasdaq Halt Cross. In addition, all orders priced better than the price determined in the Nasdaq Halt Cross also would need to be satisfied.

*Amendments to Rules 4120(c)(9), 4753(a)(3) and 4753(b)(2)*

Nasdaq proposes to amend Rules 4120(c)(9), 4753(a)(3) and 4753(b)(2) to establish requirements for disseminating information, establishing the opening price and initiating trading through the Nasdaq Halt Cross in a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise.

Nasdaq proposes to add Rule 4120(c)(9)(B) to specify that in the case of the Direct Listing with a Capital Raise, a security shall not be released for trading by Nasdaq unless the expected price at which the cross would occur (as defined in Rule 4120(c)(8)(A)(i)) is at or above the price that is 20% below the lowest price of the price range established by the issuer in its effective registration statement.<sup>11</sup> This requirement would be in addition to the existing conditions described in Rule 4120(c)(8)(A)(i), (ii), and (iii), which would continue to apply.<sup>12</sup>

Because the financial advisor is responsible for determining when the security subject to the Nasdaq Halt Cross is ready to trade, these proposed rule changes would make the financial advisor responsible for determining whether the Halt Cross for a Direct Listing with a Capital

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<sup>11</sup> SEC Rule 430A and question 227.03 of the SEC Staff's Compliance and Disclosure Interpretations, dated November 6, 2017, generally allow a company to price a public offering 20% outside of the disclosed price range without regard to the materiality of the changes to the disclosure contained in the company's registration statement.

<sup>12</sup> Rule 4120(c)(8)(A) provides that a security will not be released for trading until Nasdaq receives notice from the underwriter of the IPO or financial advisor in the case of a Direct Listing that the security is ready to trade, the system verifies that all market orders will be executed in the cross, and the price determined in the cross satisfies a price validation test.

Raise can proceed. If there is insufficient buy interest to satisfy the CDL Order as required by this proposed rule, the cross would not proceed and such security would not begin trading. If the cross cannot be conducted, the Exchange would notify market participants via a Trader Update that the Direct Listing with a Capital Raise has been cancelled and any orders for that security that have been entered on the Exchange, including the CDL Order, would be cancelled back to the entering firms.

Because the CDL Order will be a market order, if the Halt Cross proceeds, that order will execute in full in the Halt Cross, along with orders priced at or better than the price determined in the Halt Cross. As noted above, the Halt Cross would not be allowed to proceed if the price calculated is 20% or more below the lowest price disclosed by the company in its effective registration statement. There would be no upper limit to the price determined in the Halt Cross.

Nasdaq also proposes changes to Rules 4573(a)(3) and 4753(b)(2) to make adjustments to the calculation of the Current Reference Price, which is disseminated in the Nasdaq Order Imbalance Indicator, in the case of a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise and for how the price at which the Nasdaq Halt Cross will execute. In each case, where there are multiple prices that would satisfy the conditions for determining a price, Nasdaq proposes to modify the fourth tie-breaker for a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise, to use the price closest to the price that is 20% below the lowest price of the price range disclosed by the issuer in its effective registration statement.

Finally, Nasdaq proposes to amend Rule 4120(c)(9) to specify that the activities performed by a financial advisor under Rule 4120(c)(8) must be conducted in a manner that is consistent with all federal securities laws, including Regulation M and other anti-manipulation

requirements.<sup>13</sup> This change will apply to traditional Direct Listings, as described under IM-5315-1, IM-5405-1 and IM-5505-1, as well as to Direct Listings with a Capital Raise, as described under proposed IM-5315-2.

## 2. Statutory Basis

The Exchange believes that its proposal is consistent with Section 6(b) of the Act,<sup>14</sup> in general, and furthers the objectives of Section 6(b)(5) of the Act,<sup>15</sup> in particular, in that it is designed to promote just and equitable principles of trade, to remove impediments to and perfect the mechanism of a free and open market and a national market system, and, in general to protect investors and the public interest.

Nasdaq believes that the proposed amendment to the listing requirements is consistent with the protection of investors. The proposal would require that a company completing a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise have an aggregate market value of unrestricted publicly-held shares immediately prior to listing together with the market value of shares the company sells in the opening auction total at least \$110 million (or \$100 million, if the Company has stockholders' equity of at least \$110 million), with such market value calculated using a price per share equal to 20% below the lowest price of the price range established by the issuer in its registration statement. While officers, directors or owners of more than 10% of the company's common stock prior to the opening auction may purchase shares sold by the company or other shareholders in the opening transaction on Nasdaq, in the event that such purchases are not inconsistent with general anti-manipulation provisions, Regulation M, and other applicable

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<sup>13</sup> Rule 4120(c)(8) describes the activities performed by an underwriter in an IPO and by a financial advisor in a Direct Listing.

<sup>14</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78f(b).

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

securities laws, Nasdaq expects that a company expecting to sell a significant portion of its shares to officers, directors and existing significant shareholders would not undertake a public listing through a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise. Nasdaq also notes that a company may list on the Global Select Market in connection with its initial public offering with a market value of unrestricted publicly held shares of \$45 million and that unlike a company listing in connection with a Direct Listing that could qualify for the price-based initial listing requirements based on a Valuation, a company listing in connection with a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise, like an IPO, must qualify for such requirements based on the minimum price at which it could sell shares in the offering. The higher requirement, along with the ability of all investors to purchase shares in the opening process on the Exchange, should result in companies using a Direct Listing a Capital Raise having adequate public float and a liquid trading market after the completion of the opening auction.

Nasdaq also believes that it is consistent with the protection of investors to calculate the security's bid price and values derived from the security's price using a price per share equal to the price that is 20% below the lowest price of the price range disclosed by the issuer in its registration statement. Commission rules and interpretations generally allow the sale of securities pursuant to an effective registration statement at a price that is 20% below the lowest price of the price range disclosed by the issuer in its registration statement. As a result, Nasdaq will allow the Halt Cross to take place as low as this price, but no lower, and so this is the minimum price at which the company could be listed.

The proposed requirement that a company that lists on the Nasdaq Global Select Markets through a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise must begin trading of the company's securities following the initial pricing through the Halt Cross will promote fair and orderly markets by

protecting against volatility in the pricing and initial trading of securities covered by the proposed rule change. Accordingly, Nasdaq believes these changes, as required by Section 6(b)(5) of the Exchange Act, are reasonably designed to protect investors and the public interest and promote just and equitable principles of trade for the opening of securities listing in connection with a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise on the Nasdaq Global Select Market.

Nasdaq also believes that the proposed adoption of the CDL Order type in Rule 4702 and the addition of requirements to the operation of the Nasdaq Halt Cross in Rule 4120(c)(9) will remove impediments to and perfect the mechanism of a free and open market and a national market system because it would guarantee that the Nasdaq Halt Cross would only occur above a minimum specified price, as described above, and, if the Halt Cross occurs, all shares offered by the company would be sold at no less than such minimum price. Unlike an IPO, a company listing through a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise would not have an underwriter to guarantee that a specified number of shares would be sold by the company at a price consistent with disclosure in the company's effective registration statement. This certainty would be effected in two ways. First, the proposed CDL Order would be required to be equal to the total number of shares disclosed as being offered by the company in the prospectus included in the effective registration statement filed in connection with its listing. The Nasdaq Halt Cross would only occur if all of the shares in this market order could be executed. Second, the Nasdaq Halt Cross would be required to occur at a price per share no less than the price that is 20% below the lowest price of the price range disclosed by the issuer in its registration statement. Nasdaq further believes that these proposed changes would remove impediments to and perfect the mechanism of a free and open market and a national market system because they are designed to

function seamlessly with the existing process for the Nasdaq Halt Cross, including dissemination of information about the expected price.

Nasdaq also believes that it is consistent with the protection of investors and the public interest to remind financial advisors in a Direct Listing, including Direct Listings with a Capital Raise, that activities in connection with the listing must be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the federal securities laws, including Regulation M and other anti-manipulation requirements.

Nasdaq believes that the proposed rule change to modify the fourth tie-breaker used in calculating the Current Reference Price disseminated in the Nasdaq Order Imbalance Indicator and the price at which the Nasdaq Halt Cross will occur, protects investors and the public interest. For a Direct Listing, in using the Halt Cross to initiate the initial trading in the company's securities, the Current Reference Price and price at which the Nasdaq Halt Cross will occur may be based on the most recent transaction price in a Private Placement Market where the security has had recent sustained trading in such a market over several months; otherwise the price will be determined by the Exchange in consultation with a financial advisor to the issuer. For an IPO, however, the fourth tie-breaker used in calculating the Current Reference Price, is the price that is closest to the Issuer's Initial Public Offering Price. Because a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise is similar to an IPO in that the company sells securities in the offering, the proposed rule change provides that the fourth tie-breaker in calculating the Current Reference Price for such security is the price that is closest to the price that is 20% below the lowest price of the price range disclosed by the issuer in its effective registration statement, which is the minimum price at which the Halt Cross will occur.

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. The proposed amendments would not impose any burden on competition, but would rather increase competition. In that regard, the Commission recently approved a similar proposal to allow a Direct Listing with a Capital Raise on the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>16</sup> Allowing Nasdaq to have similar rules will give issuers interested in this pathway to access the capital markets a choice of listing venues, which will enhance competition among exchanges.

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

Within 45 days of the date of publication of this notice in the Federal Register or within such longer period up to 90 days (i) as the Commission may designate if it finds such longer period to be appropriate and publishes its reasons for so finding or (ii) as to which the Exchange consents, the Commission will: (a) by order approve or disapprove such proposed rule change, or (b) institute proceedings to determine whether the proposed rule change should be disapproved.

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<sup>16</sup> Securities Exchange Act Release No. 89684 (August 26, 2020), 85 FR 54454 (September 1, 2020) (approving SR-NYSE-2019-67). See also a letter from J. Matthew DeLesDernier, Assistant Secretary, the Office of the Secretary of the SEC, to John Carey Senior Director, NYSE Group Inc., indicating that the approval order is stayed until the Commission orders otherwise. (Available at <https://www.sec.gov/rules/sro/nyse/2020/34-89684-carey-letter.pdf>).

#### 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-2020-057 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-2020-057. This file number should be included on the subject line if e-mail is used. To help the Commission process and review 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 such 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-2020-057, 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>17</sup>

J. Matthew DeLesDernier  
Assistant Secretary

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