



SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Release No. 34-89913; File No. SR-Phlx-2020-45]

Self-Regulatory Organizations; Nasdaq PHLX LLC; Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of Proposed Rule Change to Amend the Exchange's Transaction Credits at Equity 7, Section 3

September 17, 2020

Pursuant to Section 19(b)(1) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (“Act”)¹, and Rule 19b-4 thereunder,² notice is hereby given that on September 10, 2020, Nasdaq PHLX LLC (“Phlx” 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 the Exchange's transaction credits at Equity 7, Section 3, as described further below. The text of the proposed rule change is available on the Exchange's website at <https://listingcenter.nasdaq.com/rulebook/phlx/rules>, at the principal office of the Exchange, and at the Commission's Public Reference Room.

¹ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(1).

² 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 Exchange proposes to revise its schedule of order execution and routing credits, at Equity 7, Section 3, to add three new credits for member organizations with non-displayed orders that provide liquidity to the Exchange. Presently, the Exchange already provides one such credit – a \$0.0023 per share executed credit for all orders with midpoint pegging that provide liquidity. For all other non-display orders that provide liquidity, it presently provides no credits. Going forward, the Exchange proposes to add the following new credits for member organizations with non-displayed orders that provide liquidity to the Exchange:

- A \$0.0004 per share executed credit for orders entered by a member organization that provides 0.01% or more of total Consolidated Volume³

³ As used in this Rule, the term "Consolidated Volume" shall mean 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. See Equity 7, Section 3.

during the month through non-displayed orders (other than midpoint orders) that provide liquidity;

- A \$0.0007 per share executed credit for orders entered by a member organization that provides 0.02% or more of total Consolidated Volume during the month through non-displayed orders (other than midpoint orders) that provide liquidity; and
- A \$0.0012 per share executed credit for orders entered by a member organization that provides 0.05% or more of total Consolidated Volume during the month through non-displayed orders (other than midpoint orders) that provide liquidity.

The Exchange believes that the addition of these three new credits will incentivize member organizations to add non-displayed liquidity to the Exchange. Moreover, the proposal broadens the availability of credits to member organizations that add non-displayed liquidity other than midpoint pegging orders. In incentivizing member organizations to increase the extent of their non-displayed liquidity adding activity on the Exchange, the Exchange intends to improve the overall quality and attractiveness of the PSX market.

Impact of the Changes

Those participants that act as significant providers of non-displayed liquidity to the Exchange will benefit directly from the proposed addition of the new credits. Other participants will also benefit from the new credits insofar as any increase in liquidity adding activity on the Exchange will improve the overall quality of the market, to the benefit of all member organizations.

The Exchange notes that its proposal is not otherwise targeted at or expected to be limited in its applicability to a specific segment of market participants nor will it apply differently to different types of market participants.

2. Statutory Basis

The Exchange believes that its proposal is consistent with Section 6(b) of the Act,⁴ in general, and furthers the objectives of Sections 6(b)(4) and 6(b)(5) of the Act,⁵ 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 also consistent with Section 11A of the Act relating to the establishment of the national market system for securities.

The Proposal is Reasonable

The Exchange's proposed changes to its schedule of credits are 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

⁴ 15 U.S.C. 78f(b).

⁵ 15 U.S.C. 78f(b)(4) and (5).

afford to take its market share percentages for granted’ because ‘no exchange possesses a monopoly, regulatory or otherwise, in the execution of order flow from broker dealers’”⁶

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.”⁷

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, and it represents a small percentage of the overall market. 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.

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

⁶ 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)).

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

respective pricing schedules. Within the foregoing context, the proposal represents a reasonable attempt by the Exchange to increase its liquidity and market share relative to its competitors.

The Exchange has designed its proposed schedule of credits to provide increased overall incentives to members to increase their liquidity adding activity on the Exchange. An increase in liquidity adding activity on the Exchange will, in turn, improve the quality of the PSX market and increase its attractiveness to existing and prospective participants.

The Exchange notes that those participants that are dissatisfied with the proposed new credits are free to shift their order flow to competing venues that offer them higher credits.

The Proposal is an Equitable Allocation of Credits

The Exchange believes its proposal will allocate its proposed new credits fairly among its market participants. It is equitable for the Exchange to increase its credits to participants whose orders add liquidity to the Exchange as a means of incentivizing increased liquidity adding activity on the Exchange as well as to base the receipt of the credits on a member organization engaging in a threshold volume of liquidity adding activity on the Exchange. An increase in overall liquidity adding activity on the Exchange will improve the quality of the PSX market and increase its attractiveness to existing and prospective participants.

Any participant that is dissatisfied with the proposed new credits is free to shift their order flow to competing venues that provide more generous pricing or less stringent qualifying criteria.

The Proposed Credit 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.

To the extent that the proposed changes succeed in increasing liquidity adding activity on the Exchange, this will improve market quality and the attractiveness of the PSX market, to the benefit of all existing and prospective participants.

Moreover, any participant that is dissatisfied with the proposed new credits is free to shift their order flow to competing venues that provide more generous pricing or less stringent qualifying criteria.

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 member organizations of the Exchange will benefit from any increase in market activity that the

proposal effectuates. Member organizations may grow or modify their businesses so that they can receive the higher credits. Moreover, member organizations are free to trade on other venues to the extent they believe that the 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 proposal 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 will not impose a burden on competition because the Exchange's execution services are completely voluntary and subject to extensive competition from a multitude of other live exchanges and off-exchange venues. 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 credits 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 credits in response, and because market participants may readily adjust their order routing practices, the Exchange believes that the degree to which credits change in this market may impose any burden on competition is extremely limited.

The proposed new credits are reflective of this competition because, as a threshold issue, the Exchange is a relatively small market so its ability to burden intermarket competition is limited. In this regard, even the largest U.S. equities exchange by volume has less than 17-18% 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 comprises approximately 44% of industry volume.

The Exchange intends for the proposed changes to its schedule of credits to increase member organization incentives to engage in the addition of non-displayed liquidity on the Exchange. These changes are procompetitive and reflective of the Exchange's efforts to make it an attractive and vibrant venue to market participants.

In sum, if the changes proposed herein is unattractive to market participants, it is likely that the Exchange will lose market share as a result. Accordingly, the Exchange does not believe that the proposed changes will impair the ability of member organizations 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.⁸

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. Please include File Number SR-Phlx-2020-45 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.

⁸ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(3)(A)(ii).

All submissions should refer to File Number SR-Phlx-2020-45. 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 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-Phlx-2020-45 and should be submitted on or before **[INSERT DATE 21 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

For the Commission, by the Division of Trading and Markets, pursuant to delegated authority.⁹

J. Matthew DeLesDernier,

Assistant Secretary.

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⁹ 17 CFR 200.30-3(a)(12).