

Mysterious Ways

Alert: Clarity Around the SEC's Pro Rata Share Disclosure Rules

- **The Publication of “Pro Rata” Financial Statements is No Longer Allowed** — Statements made by a member of the SEC’s Real Estate Group within the Corporate Finance division at a NAREIT conference earlier this week regarding the elimination of pro rata financial statements and other pro rata disclosure from supplemental packages caused an uproar among many REIT financial officers and members of the investment community. The issue relates not only to the elimination of this **crucial** disclosure that allows the investment community greater transparency into REIT performance (especially those with JVs and funds), but that the SEC is planning to enforce these rules with comment letters following Q3 earnings starting in the next few weeks. In follow-up, we’ve had several conversations with contacts at NAREIT, the SEC, and Goodwin Procter to better understand the new rules and offer our thoughts, potential solutions and need for more time to enforce. Following those conversations and a communication issued by NAREIT today, there is at least a short term solution to at least have the pro rata information in – just not totaled. That said, there will likely be items that evolve, and further discussions / stakeholder engagement will be necessary to not eliminate key information. We provide our thoughts and clarity around the guidance herein.
- **Some Background on the SEC’s Guidelines** — In May 2016, the SEC’s Division of Corporation Finance issued updated Compliance & Disclosure Interpretations (C&DIs) regarding the use of non-GAAP financial measures and prominence requirements. These changes came from the Corporate Finance Division’s Office of the Chief Accountant – so the guidelines are SEC-wide and apply to all companies, not just REITs. Many REITs made changes to Q2 disclosure to comply, based on their interpretation of the guidance. This week, the further clarification around the C&DI was provided, extending to the **elimination** of pro rata financial statements. The SEC’s primary concern with the presentation of these statements is the combination of consolidated GAAP information with non-GAAP pro rata adjustments – i.e. an income statement and/or balance sheet showing the total sum by line item (the combination of consolidated, minus non-controlling interest in consolidated, plus REIT share of unconsolidated). For REITs that disclose a full pro rata financial statement (ex: SPG, GGP, MAC, KIM, PLD, DLR, AKR, DDR and many others that have pro rata info), the primary issue is the showing the sum total of all. The concern surrounds the lack of control over JV assets, hence the equity method. We disagree with the elimination of this info, as it is critical to REIT analysis.
- **Near Term Solution** — While we voiced our displeasure with the decision, having come from the highest levels of the commission (not from the Real Estate group) it’s not likely to be overturned anytime soon without significant discussions from financial statement users, preparers and creators. For now, based on NAREIT’s memo – it appears at least the information can be included – just not totaled. See *further thoughts and details herein*.

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- **Near Term Solution (continued)** — NAREIT responded with further clarification, suggesting that while the combination of GAAP and non-GAAP information cannot be presented as combined in the supplemental, that REITs can (on separate pages) provide the components for users to do the calculations themselves. For example, the consolidated GAAP income statement and balance sheets must stand alone, as always. Any presentation of non-controlling interest or pro rata share of JV adjustments can be presented by line item, but must be on a separate page and cannot be combined with the GAAP line items anywhere in the supplemental. So REITs are allowed to have separate pages showing a full JV IS and BS on a pro rata basis – the info cannot be presented alongside the GAAP financial statements. This allows financial statement users to do the pro rata math themselves by line item, which (while more work for us) is better than not having the information at all.
- **Beyond Financial Statements – Clarity, but Still Some Questions** — In addition to financial statement disclosure, this guidance also applies to any “combined” pro rata disclosure anywhere in the supplemental. For ex, the disclosure of a total pro rata debt number is not allowed – REITs can show total cons. debt in accordance with GAAP, but then any minority interest or JV share adjustments must be presented on a different page, and the “share of total debt” must not be disclosed at all. At the asset level, however, share of debt should be ok. Pretty much the rule of thumb is that non-GAAP pro rata adjustments can be disclosed, but that adjustment cannot be shown alongside or combined with a GAAP IS or BS line item. Here’s where it gets fuzzy: Occupancy, ABR and releasing spreads are often shown on a pro rata basis – it’s unclear whether the rules would apply there. SS NOI is not a GAAP number, but it’s unclear if showing this on a pro rata basis is allowed. Net debt to EBITDA is also often provided on a pro rata basis – rightly so in our view given the tendency for higher leverage among JV assets – these types of ratios will not likely be allowed to be shown on a pro rata basis. Companies can provide the pieces for investors to get there themselves, but not likely the pro rata ratio. We asked many of these questions to the SEC, and we expect they will revisit and provide further clarity and guidelines around these and other performance metrics and non-GAAP disclosure in the coming months.
- **What About FFO and Calls?** — These pro rata disclosure rules do not apply to the reconciliations to FFO. According to the SEC, REITs’ pro rata adjustments (i.e. pro rata D&A) in reconciling to “NAREIT FFO” are allowed to be presented as before. Additionally, for now at least, pro rata adjustments made in reconciling to “Core FFO” (i.e. pro rata debt extinguishment charges) are also allowed. It would appear that these rules do not apply to quarterly earnings calls. REITs are still allowed to discuss pro rata numbers as before – i.e. pro rata debt and EBITDA.
- **The Implications of a Comment Letter** — If the SEC finds that a company’s disclosure is not compliant with SEC rules and guidelines including the most recent C&DI, it can issue a “comment letter” asking for added, changed, or removal of disclosure. There is then correspondence between the company and the SEC staff until the issue is resolved. It’s our understanding after speaking with the SEC and Goodwin Proctor, that an outstanding comment letter relating to supplemental disclosure would not inhibit a REIT’s ability to issue debt or equity under a shelf, given that REITs are accelerated filers and the 8-K supplemental furnished to the SEC is not incorporated into the S3 registration document (unlike the 10Q or 10K). The company’s council may question whether it’s a good idea to issue while a comment letter is still outstanding, but there’s no restriction. The process would be a request for how the company plans to revise its disclosure under the new guidance – so in the case of a comment letter received following Q3 results, the SEC will likely ask a company to revise its Q3 disclosure, but explain how the disclosure will change with Q4 results. Notably, these new rules apply whether or not a REIT furnishes its supplemental as an 8K with the SEC.

Appendix A-1

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