Dec 28, 2020

Waste Connections Inc. (WCN)

$101.49 (As of 12/25/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **$108.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months	**Zacks Recommendation:** (Since: 04/07/19) Prior Recommendation: Underperform	**Neutral**
Short Term: 1-3 Months	**Zacks Rank:** (1-5)	**3-Hold**
	Zacks Style Scores:	VGM:B
	Value: C | Growth: B | Momentum: A	

Summary

Waste Connections' shares have outperformed its industry over the past year, partly due to better-than-expected earnings and revenue performance in the past four quarters. The company's focus on secondary and rural markets to garner a higher local market share is appreciable. The company has optimal asset positioning to generate higher profitability. Acquisitions act as a key growth catalyst. Consistent efforts in rewarding its shareholders instill investor confidence. On the flip side, seasonality is likely to hurt the company's revenues. Stringent environmental, health and safety laws have been hindering the company's operations and raising operating costs. The company's Canadian operations exposes it to foreign currency exchange rate risks. High debt may limit the company's future expansion and worsen its risk profile.

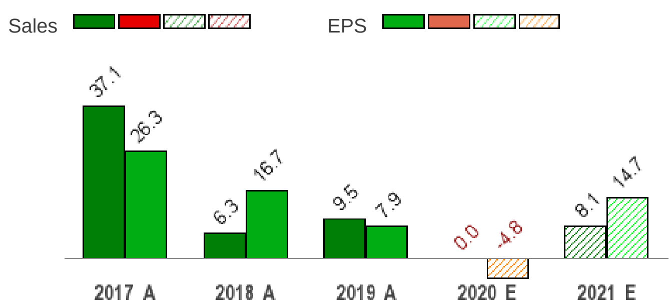
Price, Consensus & Surprise

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	$111.04 - $70.87
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	1,016,995
Market Cap	$26.7 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	11.8%
Beta	0.53
Dividend / Dividend Yield	$0.62 / 0.6%
Industry	Waste Removal Services
Zacks Industry Rank	Top 33% (84 out of 255)
Last EPS Surprise	9.1%
Last Sales Surprise	0.7%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.0%
Expected Report Date	02/10/2021
Earnings ESP	0.0%
P/E TTM	38.2
P/E F1	39.2
PEG F1	5.9
P/S TTM	4.9

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Sales Estimates (millions of $)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	1,343 E	1,483 E	1,537 E	1,467 E	5,827 E
2020	1,352 A	1,306 A	1,390 A	1,343 E	5,389 E
2019	1,245 A	1,370 A	1,412 A	1,362 A	5,389 A

EPS Estimates

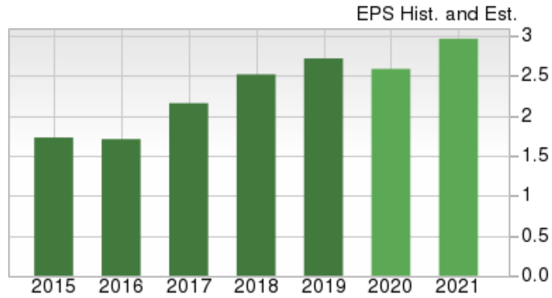
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	$0.65 E	$0.77 E	$0.84 E	$0.76 E	$2.97 E
2020	$0.65 A	$0.60 A	$0.72 A	$0.62 E	$2.59 E
2019	$0.62 A	$0.69 A	$0.73 A	$0.69 A	$2.72 A

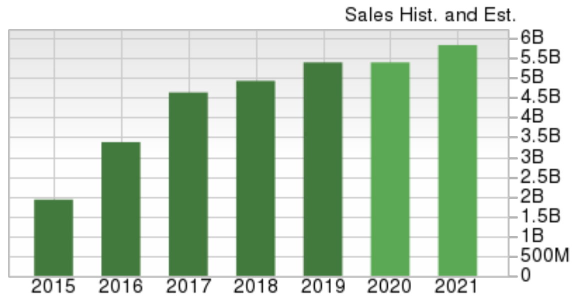
*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and Sales estimates, is as of 12/25/2020. The reports text is as of 12/28/2020.

Overview

Waste Connections is an integrated solid waste services company that provides non-hazardous waste collection, transfer, disposal and recycling services across the U.S. and Canada. The company offers non-hazardous oilfield waste treatment, recovery and disposal services in several of the active natural resource producing areas in the United States, including the Permian, Bakken and Eagle Ford Basins through its R360 Environmental Solutions subsidiary.





It serves over six million residential, commercial, industrial, and exploration and production (E&P) customers in 41 states in the U.S. and six provinces in Canada. In addition, the company provides intermodal services for the movement of cargo and solid waste containers in the Pacific Northwest.

In 2018, Waste Connections generated $5.39 billion (up 9.5% year over year) in revenues. The company manages its operations through five geographic operating segments and its E&P segment.

The **Southern** segment (22% of total revenues in 2018) is comprised of locations in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, southern Oklahoma, western Tennessee and Texas.

The **Eastern** segment (24%) comprises Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, eastern Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin.

The **Western** segment (20%) comprises operating locations in Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and western Wyoming.

The **Canada** segment (14%) serves customers located in the state of Michigan and in the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan.

The **Central** segment (15%) includes Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, western Texas, Utah and eastern Wyoming.

The **E&P** segment (5%) serves customers in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, Wyoming and along the Gulf of Mexico.

Through service line, the company generates revenues from waste collection, transfer, disposal and recycling services, non-hazardous E&P waste treatment, recovery and disposal services and intermodal services.

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

> Operational efficiency and buyouts act as key growth catalysts for Waste Connections.

- The waste management industry stands to benefit from the current scenario **as proper disposal of used masks, gloves, suits, syringes and other medical equipment is of utmost importance to curb the spread of coronavirus**. Government initiatives as well as stringent rules and regulations to advance sustainable waste management mechanisms and put a check on illegal dumping are also expected to boost the industry. Rising environmental concerns, rapid industrialization, increase in population and an expected increase in non-hazardous waste as a result of rapid economic growth should enhance business opportunities for waste management companies. Growing adoption of recycling techniques, development of technologies and advanced waste collection solutions are key trends within the industry. Recycling remains a major growth area, with most industry players undertaking municipal solid waste and non-hazardous industrial waste recycling measures. Per a report by statista, the global waste management market is expected to reach $530 billion by 2025 from $330.6 billion in 2017, witnessing a CAGR of 6% from 2018 to 2025. All these factors bode well for Waste Connections.

- Waste Connections typically targets secondary and rural markets to garner a higher local market share, which would be difficult to attain in more competitive urban markets. This decreases the company's exposure to customer churn and helps improve financial returns. In certain niche markets, like E&P waste treatment and disposal, **early mover advantage** in certain rural basins play a key role in improving market positioning and generating higher financial returns, given the limited availability of existing third-party-owned waste disposal alternatives. The company focuses on increasing market penetration and offering additional services to capitalize on future drilling opportunities in those areas. Waste Connections also aims to leverage its franchise-based platforms to expand customer base beyond the exclusive market territories.

- With **prime location of disposal sites** within competitive markets, Waste Connections has optimal asset positioning to generate higher profitability. Given the importance of and costs associated with the transportation of waste to treatment and disposal sites, having disposal capacity proximate to the waste stream offer a competitive advantage and serve as a barrier to entry. An experienced management team, decentralized operating strategy and financial strength remain additional tailwinds.

- Waste Connections generally focuses on providing vertically integrated services, from collection through disposal of solid waste in landfills that it owns or operates. In addition, the operations are managed on a decentralized basis to place decision-making authority close to the customer, enabling it to identify and address customers' needs on a real-time basis in a cost-effective manner. This **low-overhead, highly-efficient operational structure** allows it to expand into geographically contiguous markets and operate in relatively small communities that other competitors may not find attractive.

- Waste Connections has been **active on the acquisition front**. It follows a strategic combination of financial, market and management criteria to evaluate opportunities from acquisitions. In new markets, it uses its initial buyout as an operating base and seeks to strengthen the acquired operation's presence by providing additional services, adding customers and making "tuck-in" acquisitions of other waste companies in that market or adjacent markets. In 2019, the company completed the purchase of 21 individually immaterial non-hazardous solid waste collection, recycling, transfer and disposal businesses. Previously, the company completed 20 acquisitions in 2018, 14 in 2017 and 12 in 2016. Some of the notable acquisitions include that American Disposal Services and certain affiliates, Groot Industries and Progressive Waste.

- Waste Connections' is consistent in **rewarding its shareholders**. In 2019, the company paid $175.1 million of dividend. In 2018, Waste Connections paid $152.5 million of dividend and repurchased shares worth $58.9 million. In 2017, and 2016, the company returned $131.9 million and $92.5 million to its shareholders, respectively, through dividend payment. Such moves indicate the company's commitment to create value for shareholders and underline its confidence in its business.

- Waste Connections' **shares have gained** 12% over the past year against the industry's loss of 12%. The price performance partly reflects better-than-expected earnings and revenue performance in the past four quarters.

Reasons To Sell:

> Seasonality, high debt, foreign exchange risks and stringent regulatory norms weigh on Waste Connections.

- Waste Connections' **revenues are highly seasonal in nature** with first-quarter revenues being the lowest. While revenues rise in the second and third quarters, fourth-quarter revenues are lower than the prior two quarters. The expected revenue fluctuation between the highest and lowest quarters due to seasonality is around 12%. This is mainly due to lower volume of solid waste generated during winter and early spring owing to comparatively lesser construction and demolition activities and reduced E&P activity. Severe cold weather conditions further slow down waste collection activities, resulting in higher labor and operational costs. The seasonality is also attributable to lower drilling programs and lower volumes of E&P waste during mild winter conditions. All these seasonal factors lower predictably in revenue generation and increase operating risks.

- Over the years, **stringent environmental, health and safety laws** and regulations have severely hindered operations and increased operating costs of the company. In addition, the industry is subject to regular enactment of new or amended federal, state and local statutes and regulations that further impose substantial capital and operational limitations. The barriers to entry into the regulated waste collection and disposal business are also very low. Competitors often resort to aggressive pricing to gain higher market share. This capital-intensive industry further includes larger and better capitalized companies, which affect its ability to invest in substantial labor and capital resources. All these factors erode the profitability of the company and compress its margins.

- While delivering environmental and waste management services, Waste Connections remains exposed to multiple operational risks such as truck accidents, equipment defects, malfunctions and failures. Operating fueling stations and landfill gas collection and control systems involves additional risks of fire and explosion. Moreover, the company's operations in Canada expose it to **risks associated with foreign currency exchange rate fluctuations and uncertainty from monetary devaluation**. Notably, the company incurred foreign currency translation loss of $1.4 million in 2018 and $2.2 million in 2017.

- Waste Connections' cash and cash equivalent balance of $859 million at the end of the third-quarter 2020 was well below the long-term debt level of $4.71 billion underscoring that the company **doesn't have enough cash to meet this debt burden**. The cash level, however, can meet the short-term debt of $84 million.

Last Earnings Report

Waste Connections Surpasses Q3 Earnings & Revenue Estimates

Quarter Ending	09/2020
Report Date	**Oct 28, 2020**
Sales Surprise	**0.65%**
EPS Surprise	**9.09%**
Quarterly EPS	**0.72**
Annual EPS (TTM)	**2.66**

Waste Connections reported better-than-expected third-quarter 2020 results.

Adjusted earnings of 72 cents per share beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 9.1% but decreased 1.4% year over year. Revenues of $1.39 billion beat the consensus mark by 0.7% but declined 1.6% year over year.

Acquisitions contributed $44.2 million to revenues in the reported quarter.

Revenues by Segment

Solid Waste Collection segment revenues increased 1.9% year over year to $1.01 billion. The segment accounted for 72.4% of total revenues.

Solid Waste Disposal and Transfer segment revenues decreased 1.9% from the year-ago quarter to $311.6 million. The segment contributed 22.4% of total revenues.

E&P Waste Treatment, Recovery and Disposal segment revenues decreased 64.4% from the year-ago quarter to $23.6 million. The segment contributed 1.7% to total revenues.

Intermodal and Other segment revenues increased 2.6% to $27.1 million. The segment accounted for 2% of total revenues.

Solid Waste Recycling segment revenues improved 51% year over year to $20.7 million. The segment accounted for 1.5% of total revenues.

Operating Results

Adjusted EBITDA in the reported quarter was $432.6 million compared with $443.6 million in the year-ago quarter. Adjusted EBITDA margin came in at 31.1% compared with 31.4% in the year-ago quarter.

Operating income totaled $230.7 million compared with$236.6 millionin the year-ago quarter. Operating income margin came in at 16.6% compared with 16.7% in the year-ago quarter.

Balance Sheet and Cash Flow

Waste Connections exited third-quarter 2020 with cash and cash equivalents of $859.09 million compared with $790.55 million at the end of the prior quarter. Long-term debt was $4.68 billion compared with $4.69 billion at the end of the prior quarter.

The company generated $432.4 million of cash from operating activities in the reported quarter. Adjusted free cash flow was $283.8 million. Capital expenditure totaled $151.9 million.

Waste Connections' board of directors approved a dividend hike of 10.8%, reflecting its 10th consecutive double-digit percentage increase since the initiation of dividend payment in 2010. The company paid out dividend of $49 million in the reported quarter.

Recent News

On **Oct 28, 2020**, Waste Connections' board of directors approved a dividend hike of 10.8%, reflecting its 10th consecutive double-digit percentage increase since the initiation of dividend payment in 2010. The company paid out dividend of $49 million in the reported quarter.

On **Aug 6, 2020**, Waste Connections announced that it has received approval from the Toronto Stock Exchange for the annual renewal of its normal course issuer bid (the "NCIB"). The renewal will start with the expiry of the company's existing NCIB on Aug 7, 2020.

Valuation

Waste Connections shares are up 12% in the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Business Services sector are down 12% and 6.5% over the same time frame. The S&P 500 index is up 17% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at trailing 12-month EV/EBITDA of 18.31X, which compares to 11.1X for the Zacks sub-industry, 16.2X for the Zacks sector and 16.79X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 33.03X and as low as 10.2X, with a 5-year median of 16.95X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our $108.00 price target reflects 36.49X forward 12-month earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for WCN.

Valuation Multiples - WCN

		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
EV/EBITDA TTM	Current	18.31	11.1	16.2	16.79
	5-Year High	33.03	12.44	16.35	16.87
	5-Year Low	10.2	8.3	8.53	9.56
	5-Year Median	16.95	10.71	10.89	13.17
P/E F12M	Current	34.25	28.14	30.33	22.86
	5-Year High	39.19	31.69	31	23.79
	5-Year Low	18.37	19.82	18.66	15.3
	5-Year Median	28.97	23.81	21.31	17.81
P/S F12M	Current	4.58	2.3	5.64	4.34
	5-Year High	6.6	2.51	5.64	4.34
	5-Year Low	1.28	1.68	3.06	3.17
	5-Year Median	3.93	2.14	3.61	3.67

As of 12/24/2020 *Source: Zacks Investment Research*

Industry Analysis **Zacks Industry Rank:** Top 33% (84 out of 255)

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Clean Harbors, Inc. **(CLH)**	Outperform	1
Aqua Metals, Inc. **(AQMS)**	Neutral	3
Covanta Holding Corporation **(CVA)**	Neutral	2
Casella Waste Systems, Inc. **(CWST)**	Neutral	3
US Ecology, Inc. **(ECOL)**	Neutral	3
Republic Services, Inc. **(RSG)**	Neutral	2
Stericycle, Inc. **(SRCL)**	Neutral	3
Waste Management, Inc. **(WM)**	Neutral	3

The positions listed should not be deemed a recommendation to buy, hold or sell.

Industry Comparison Industry: Waste Removal Services

	WCN	X Industry	S&P 500	CLH	SRCL	WM
				Industry Peers		
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Outperform	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	1	3	3
VGM Score	B	-	-	A	B	B
Market Cap	26.68 B	176.34 M	26.20 B	4.16 B	6.38 B	49.44 B
# of Analysts	9	4	13	4	8	9
Dividend Yield	0.61%	0.00%	1.48%	0.00%	0.00%	1.86%
Value Score	C	-	-	C	C	C
Cash/Price	0.03	0.09	0.06	0.13	0.01	0.01
EV/EBITDA	19.05	11.85	14.57	9.56	31.97	14.09
PEG F1	5.88	4.16	2.83	NA	5.10	4.02
P/B	4.00	2.17	3.64	3.19	2.73	6.91
P/CF	18.22	10.43	13.90	9.99	8.56	13.97
P/E F1	39.14	30.92	22.12	35.77	30.38	29.52
P/S TTM	4.93	3.15	2.85	1.29	2.26	3.30
Earnings Yield	2.55%	2.80%	4.36%	2.80%	3.30%	3.38%
Debt/Equity	0.71	0.80	0.70	1.19	0.80	1.43
Cash Flow ($/share)	5.57	0.04	6.93	7.54	8.14	8.38
Growth Score	B	-	-	B	A	C
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	12.55%	12.81%	9.71%	65.19%	-12.84%	13.08%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-4.82%	-0.55%	1.26%	11.38%	-13.40%	-9.93%
Current Cash Flow Growth	8.62%	-21.43%	5.23%	9.79%	-27.67%	4.96%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	28.79%	6.52%	8.33%	-3.62%	9.45%	6.90%
Current Ratio	1.40	1.49	1.38	2.33	0.82	1.20
Debt/Capital	41.38%	47.60%	41.97%	54.31%	44.55%	58.90%
Net Margin	3.83%	-15.17%	10.40%	3.72%	-11.53%	10.03%
Return on Equity	10.43%	2.70%	14.99%	9.35%	9.42%	24.96%
Sales/Assets	0.39	0.45	0.50	0.78	0.47	0.56
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	0.01%	0.00%	0.35%	-7.51%	-19.34%	-2.09%
Momentum Score	A	-	-	A	F	B
Daily Price Change	0.26%	0.05%	0.29%	0.05%	0.55%	0.65%
1-Week Price Change	-1.05%	0.00%	0.87%	1.70%	2.04%	1.73%
4-Week Price Change	-2.53%	0.00%	0.99%	0.04%	-2.90%	-2.21%
12-Week Price Change	-1.47%	10.90%	14.77%	33.58%	10.07%	3.64%
52-Week Price Change	12.22%	-13.31%	5.47%	-13.31%	8.28%	3.38%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	1,016,995	154,313	2,028,114	264,245	466,836	1,453,284
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.12%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.24%	-0.16%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	3.92%	3.92%	3.68%	52.54%	7.06%	3.48%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.38%	-0.44%	0.00%

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Zacks Stock Rating System

We offer two rating systems that take into account investors' holding horizons: Zacks Rank and Zacks Recommendation. Each provides valuable insights into the future profitability of the stock and can be used separately or in combination with each other depending on your investment style.

Zacks Recommendation

The Zacks Recommendation aims to predict performance over the next 6 to 12 months. The foundation for the quantitatively determined Zacks Recommendation is trends in the company's estimate revisions and earnings outlook. The Zacks Recommendation is broken down into 3 Levels; Outperform, Neutral and Underperform. Unlike many Wall Street firms, we maintain a balance between the number of Outperform and Neutral recommendations. Our team of 70 analysts are fully versed in the benefits of earnings estimate revisions and how that is harnessed through the Zacks quantitative rating system. But we have given our analysts the ability to override the Zacks Recommendation for the 1200 stocks that they follow. The reason for the analyst over-rides is that there are often factors such as valuation, industry conditions and management effectiveness that a trained investment professional can spot better than a quantitative model.

Zacks Rank

The Zacks Rank is our short-term rating system that is most effective over the one- to three-month holding horizon. The underlying driver for the quantitatively-determined Zacks Rank is the same as the Zacks Recommendation, and reflects trends in earnings estimate revisions.

Zacks Style Scores

The Zacks Style Score is as a complementary indicator to the Zacks rating system, giving investors a way to focus on the highest rated stocks that best fit their own stock picking preferences.

Academic research has proven that stocks with the best Value, Growth and Momentum characteristics outperform the market. The Zacks Style Scores rate stocks on each of these individual styles and assigns a rating of A, B, C, D and F. We also produce the VGM Score (V for Value, G for Growth and M for Momentum), which combines the weighted average of the individual Style Scores into one score. This is perfectly suited for those who want their stocks to have the best scores across the board.

Value Score	C
Growth Score	B
Momentum Score	A
VGM Score	B

As an investor, you want to buy stocks with the highest probability of success. That means buying stocks with a Zacks Recommendation of Outperform, which also has a Style Score of an A or a B.

Disclosures

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ZIR uses the following rating system for the securities it covers. **Outperform-** ZIR expects that the subject company will outperform the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months. **Neutral-** ZIR expects that the company will perform in line with the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months. **Underperform-** ZIR expects the company will underperform the broader U.S. equities markets over the next six to twelve months.

Additional Disclosure

This material represents an assessment of the market and economic environment at a specific point in time and is not intended to be a forecast of future events, or a guarantee of future results. Forward-looking statements are subject to certain risks and uncertainties. Any statements that refer to expectations, projections or characterizations of future events or circumstances, including any underlying assumptions, are forwardlooking statements. Actual results, performance, or achievements may differ materially from those expressed or implied.

Returns quoted represent past performance which is no guarantee of future results. Investment returns and principal value will fluctuate so that when shares are redeemed, they may be worth more or less than their original cost. Current performance may be higher or lower than the performance shown.

Investing involves risk; principal loss is possible. There is no guarantee that companies that can issue dividends will declare, continue to pay or increase dividends.

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

52-Week High-Low: The range of the highest and lowest prices at which a stock has traded during the past year. This range is determined based on the stock's daily closing price which may differ from the intra-day high or low. Many investors use it as a technical indicator to determine a stock's current value and future price movement. The idea here is that if price breaks out from the 52-week range, in either direction, the momentum may continue in the same direction.

20-Day Average Volume (Shares): The average number of shares of a company traded in a day over the last 20 days. It is a direct indication of a security's overall liquidity. The higher the average daily trading volume, the easier it is to enter or exit the stock at a desired price with more buyers and sellers being available.

Daily Price Change: This is the percentage difference between a trading day's closing price and the prior trading day's closing price. This item is updated at 9 p.m. EST each day.

1-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 5 trading days. This change reflects the collective buying and selling sentiment over the 1-week period.

A strong weekly price increase for the stock, especially when accompanied by increased volume, is an indication of it gaining momentum.

4-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 20 trading days or past 4 weeks. This is a mediumterm price change metric and an indication of the stock gaining momentum.

12-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change of a stock's closing price over the last 60 trading days or past 12 weeks. Similar to 4-week price change, this is a medium-term price change metric. It shows whether a stock has been enjoying strong investor demand, or if it has been in consolidation, or distress over this period.

52-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock’s closing price over the last 260 trading days or past 52 weeks. This long-term price change metric is a good reference point for investors. Some investors seek stocks with the best percentage price change over the last 52 weeks, expecting the momentum to continue.

Market Cap: The number of outstanding common shares of a company times its latest price per share. This figure represents a company's size, which indicates various characteristics, including price stability and risk, in which investors could be interested.

Year-To-Date Price Change: Change in a stock's daily closing price in the period of time beginning the first day of the current calendar year through to the previous trading day.

# of Analysts: Number of EPS estimates used in calculating the current-quarter consensus. These estimates come from the brokerage analysts tracking this stock. However, the number of such analysts tracking this stock may not match the number of estimates, as all brokerage analysts may not come up with an estimate or provide it to us.

Beta: A measure of risk commonly used to compare the volatility of a stock to the overall market. The S&P 500 Index is the base for calculating beta and carries a value of 1. A stock with beta below 1 is less risky than the market as a whole. And a stock with beta above 1 is riskier.

Dividend: The portion of earnings a company is expected to distribute to its common shareholders in the next 12 months for each share they own. Dividends are usually paid quarterly. Dividend payments reflect positively on a company and help maintain investors' trust. Investors typically find dividend-paying stocks appealing because the dividend adds to any market price appreciation to result in higher return on investment (ROI). Moreover, a steady or increasing dividend payment provides investors a cushion in a down market.

Dividend Yield: The ratio of a company's annual dividend to its share price. The annual dividend used in the ratio is calculated based on the mostrecent dividend paid by the company. Dividend yield is an estimate of the dividend-only return from a stock in the next 12 months. Since dividend itself doesn’t change frequently, dividend yield usually changes with a stock’s price movement. As a result, often an unusually high dividend yield is a result of weak stock price.

S&P 500 Index: The Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500) Index is an unmanaged group of securities considered to be representative of the stock market in general. It is a market-capitalization-weighted index of stocks of the 500 largest U.S. companies. Each stock’s weight in the index is proportionate to its market value.

Industry: One of the 250+ groups that Zacks classifies all stocks into based on the nature of business. These groups are termed as expanded (aka "X") industries and map to their respective (economic) sectors; Zacks has 16 sectors.

Zacks Industry Rank: The Zacks Industry Rank is determined by calculating the average Zacks Rank for all stocks in the industry and then assigning an ordinal rank to it. For example, an industry with an average Zacks Rank of 1.6 is better than an industry with an average Zacks Rank of 2.3. So, the industry with the better average Zacks Rank would get a better Zacks Industry Rank. If an industry has the best average Zacks Rank, it would be considered the top industry (1 out of 250+), which would place it at the top 1% of Zacks-ranked industries. Studies have shown that roughly half of a stock's price movement can be attributed to the industry group it belongs to. In fact, the top 50% of Zacks-ranked industries outperforms the bottom 50% by a factor of more than 2 to 1.

Last EPS Surprise: The percentage deviation of a company's last reported earnings per share from the Zacks Consensus Estimate. Companies with a positive earnings surprise are more likely to surprise again in the future (or miss again if they recently missed).

Last Sales Surprise: The percentage deviation of a company's last reported sales from the Zacks Consensus Estimate.

Expected Report Date: This is an estimated date of a company's next earnings release. The information originated or gathered by Zacks Investment Research from its information providers or publicly available sources is the basis of this estimate.

Earnings ESP: The Zacks Earnings ESP compares the Most Accurate Estimate to the Zacks Consensus Estimate for the yet-to-be reported quarter. The Most Accurate Estimate is the most recent version of the Zacks Consensus EPS Estimate. The idea here is that analysts revising their estimates closer to an earnings release have the latest information, which could potentially be more accurate than what they and others contributing to the consensus had predicted earlier. Thus, a positive or negative Earnings ESP reading theoretically indicates the likely deviation of the actual earnings from the consensus estimate. However, the model's predictive power is significant for positive ESP readings only. A positive Earnings ESP is a strong predictor of an earnings beat, particularly when combined with a Zacks Rank #1 (Strong Buy), #2 (Buy) or #3 (Hold). Our research shows that stocks with this combination produce a positive surprise nearly 70% of the time.

Periods:

TTM: Trailing 12 months. Using TTM figures is an effective way of analyzing the most-recent financial data in an annualized format that helps neutralize the effects of seasonality and other quarter-to-quarter variation.

F1: Current fiscal year. This period is used to analyze the estimates for the ongoing full fiscal year.

F2: Next fiscal year. This period is used to analyze the estimates for the next full fiscal year.

F12M: Forward 12 months. Using F12M figures is an effective way of analyzing the near-term (the following four unreported quarters) estimates in an annualized manner. Instead of typically representing estimates for the full fiscal year, which may not represent the nitty-gritty of each quarter, F12M figures suggest an all-inclusive annualized estimate for the following four quarters. The annualization helps neutralize the potential effects of seasonality and other quarter-to-quarter variations.

P/E Ratio: The price-to-earnings ratio measures a company's current market price per share relative to its earnings per share (EPS). Usually, the trailing-12-month (TTM) EPS, current-fiscal-year (F1) EPS estimate, or forward-12-month (F12M) EPS estimate is used as the denominator. In essence, this ratio shows what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of EPS. In other words, this ratio gives a sense of what the relative value of the company is at the already reported level of earnings or at a future level of earnings.

It is one of the most widely-used multiples for determining the value of a company and helps comparing its valuation with that of a competitor, the industry group or a benchmark.

PEG Ratio: The price/earnings to growth ratio is a stock's P/E ratio using current fiscal year (F1) EPS estimate divided by its expected EPS growth rate over the coming 3 to 5 years. This ratio essentially determines a stock's value by factoring in the company's expected earnings growth and is thus believed to provide a more complete picture than just the P/E ratio, particularly for faster-growing companies.

P/S Ratio: The price-to-sales ratio is calculated as a company's current price per share divided by trailing 12 months (TTM) sales or revenues per share. This ratio shows what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of TTM sales per share. The P/S ratio is at times the only valuation metric when the company has yet to become profitable.

Cash/Price Ratio: The cash-to-price ratio or Cash Yield is calculated as cash and marketable securities per share divided by the company's current share price. Like the earnings yield, which shows the anticipated yield (or return) on a stock from earnings for each dollar invested, the cash yield does the same, with cash being the source of return instead of earnings. For example, a cash/price ratio of 0.08 suggests a return of 8% or 8 cents for every $1 investment.

EV/EBITDA Ratio: The EV/EBITDA ratio, also known as Enterprise Multiple, is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization). Usually, trailing-12-month (TTM) or forward-12-month (F12M) EBITDA is used as the denominator.

EV/Sales Ratio: The enterprise value-to-sales ratio is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by annual sales. It is an expansion of the P/S valuation, which uses market value instead of enterprise value. The EV/Sales ratio is perceived as more accurate than P/S, in part, because the market capitalization does not take a company's debt into account when valuing it.

EV/CF Ratio: The enterprise value-to-cash flow ratio is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by the trailing-12-month (TTM) operating cash flow. It's a measure of how long it would take to buy the entire business if you were able to use all the company's operating cash flow.

The EV/CF ratio is perceived as more accurate than the P/CF ratio, in part, because the market price does not take a company's debt into account when valuing it.

EV/FCF Ratio: The enterprise value-to-free cash flow metric compares a company's enterprise value to its trailing-12-month (TTM) free cash flow (FCF). This metric is very similar to the EV/CF ratio, but is considered a more exact measure owing to the fact that it uses free cash flow, which subtracts capital expenditures (CAPEX) from a company's total operating cash flow, thereby reflecting the actual cash flow available for funding growth activities and payments to shareholders.

P/EBITDA Ratio: The P/EBITDA ratio is calculated as a company's per share market value divided by EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization). This metric is very similar to the EV/EBITDA ratio, but is considered a little less exact measure as it uses market price, which does not take a company's debt into account. However, since EBITDA is often considered a proxy for cash income, the metric is used as a measure of what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of the company's cash profitability in the trailing 12 months (TTM) or forward 12 months (F12M).

P/B Ratio: The price-to-book ratio is calculated as a company's current price per share divided by its book value (total assets – liabilities – preferred stocks) per share. In short, the book value is how much a company is worth. In other words, it reflects the total value of a company's assets that its common shareholders would receive if it were to be liquidated. So, the P/B ratio indicates whether you're paying higher or lower than what would remain if the company went bankrupt immediately. Investors typically use this metric to determine how a company's stock price stacks up to its intrinsic value.

P/TB Ratio: The price-to-tangible-book value ratio is calculated as a the per share market value of a company divided by the value of its tangible assets (total assets – liabilities – preferred stocks – intangible assets) per share. Tangible book value is the same thing as book value except it excludes the value of intangible assets to get a step closer to the baseline value of the company.

P/CF Ratio: The price-to-cash flow ratio measures a company's per share market price relative to its trailing-12-month (TTM) operating cash flow per share. This metric is used to determine whether a company is undervalued or overvalued relative to another stock, industry or sector. And like the P/E ratio, a lower number is typically considered better from the value perspective.

One of the reasons why P/CF ratio is often preferred over P/E ratio is the fact that operating cash flow adds back non-cash expenses such as depreciation and amortization to net income. This feature helps valuing stocks that have positive cash flow but are not profitable because of large noncash charges.

P/FCF Ratio: The price-to-free cash flow ratio is an extension of P/CF ratio, which uses trailing-12-month (TTM) free cash flow per share instead of operating cash flow per share. This metric is considered a more exact measure than P/CF ratio, as free cash flow subtracts capital expenditures (CAPEX) from a company's total operating cash flow, thereby reflecting the actual cash flow available for funding activities that generate additional revenues.

Earnings Yield: The earnings yield is calculated as current fiscal year (F1) EPS estimate divided by the company's current share price. The ratio, which is the inverse of the P/E ratio, measures the anticipated yield (or return) from earnings for each dollar invested in a stock today.

For example, earnings yield for a stock, which is trading at $35 and expected to earn $3 per share in the current fiscal year (F1), would be 0.0857 (3/35 = 0.0857) or 8.57%. In other words, for $1 invested in the stock today, the yield from earnings is anticipated to be 8.57 cents.

Investors most commonly compare the earnings yield of a stock to that of a broad market index (such as the S&P 500) and prevailing interest rates, such as the current 10-year Treasury yield. Since bonds and stocks compete for investors' dollars, stock investors typically demand a higher yield for the extra risk they assume compared to investors of U.S. Treasury-backed securities that offer virtually risk-free returns. This additional return is referred to as the risk premium.

Debt/Equity Ratio: The debt-to-equity ratio is calculated as a company's total liabilities divided by its shareholder equity. This metric is used to gauge a company's financial leverage. In other words, it is a measure of the degree to which a company is financing its operations through debt versus its own funds. The higher the ratio, the higher the risk for shareholders.

However, this ratio is difficult to compare across industry groups where ideal amounts of debt vary. Some businesses are more capital intensive than others and typically require higher debt to finance their operations. So, a company's debt-to-equity ratio should be compared with other companies in the same industry.

Cash Flow ($/share): Cash flow per share is calculated as operating cash flow (after-tax earnings + depreciation + other non-cash charges) divided by common shares outstanding. It is used by many investors as a measure of a company's financial strength. Since cash flow per share takes into consideration a company's ability to generate cash by adding back non-cash expenses, it is regarded by some as a more accurate measure of a company's financial situation than earnings per share, which could be artificially deflated.

Current Ratio: The current ratio or liquidity ratio is a company's current assets divided by its current liabilities. It measures a company's ability to pay short-term obligations. A current ratio that is in line with the industry average or slightly higher is generally considered acceptable. A current ratio that is lower than the industry average would indicate a higher risk of distress or default. A higher number is usually better. However, a very high current ratio compared to the industry average could be an indication of inefficient use of assets by management.

Debt/Capital Ratio: Debt-to-capital ratio is a company's total debt (interest-bearing debt + both short- and long-term liabilities) divided its total capital (interest-bearing debt + shareholders' equity). It is a measure of a company's financial leverage. All else being equal, the higher the debt-to-capital ratio, the riskier the stock.

However, this ratio can vary widely from industry to industry, the ideal amount of required debt being different. Some businesses are more capital intensive than others and typically require higher debt to finance their operations. So, a company's debt-to-capital ratio should be compared with the same for its industry.

Net Margin: Net margin is calculated as net income divided by sales. It shows how much of each dollar in sales generated by a company translates into profit. For example, if a company's net margin is 15%, its net income is 15 cents for every $1 of sales it makes.

A change in margin can reflect either a change in business conditions, or a company's cost controls, or both. If a company's expenses are growing faster than sales, its net margin will decline. However, different net margin rates are considered good for different industries, so it's better to compare net margin rates of companies in the same industry group.

Return on Equity: Return on equity (ROE) is calculated as trailing-12-month net income divided by trailing-12-month average shareholder equity (including reinvested earnings). This metric is considered a measure of how effectively management is using a company's assets to generate profits. For example, if a company's ROE is 10%, it creates 10 cents profits for every $1 shareholder equity, which is basically the company's assets minus debt. A company's ROE deemed good or bad depends on what's normal for its peers or industry group.

Sales/Assets Ratio: The sales-to-assets ratio or asset utilization ratio or asset turnover ratio is calculated as a company's annual sales divided by average assets (average of assets at the beginning of the year and at the year's end). This metric helps investors understand how effectively a company is using its assets to generate sales. For example, a sales-to-assets ratio of 2.5 indicates that the company generated $2.50 in sales for every $1 of assets on its books.

The higher the sales-to-assets ratio, the better the company is performing. However, similar to many other ratios, the asset turnover ratio tends to be higher for companies in certain industries/sectors than in others. So, a company's sales-to-assets ratio should be compared with the same for its industry/sector.

Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years): This is the average annual (trailing-12-month) EPS growth rate over the last 3-5 years. This metric helps investors see how a company's EPS has grown from a long-term perspective.

Note: There are many factors that can influence short-term numbers — a recession will reduce this number, while a recovery will inflate it. The longterm perspective helps smooth out short-term events.

Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0): This is the estimated EPS growth rate for the current financial year. It is calculated as the consensus estimate for the current fiscal year (F1) divided by the reported EPS for the last completed fiscal year (F0).

Current Cash Flow Growth: It measures the latest year-over-year change in operating cash flow. Cash flow growth tells an investor how quickly a company is generating inflows of cash from operations. A positive change in the cash flow is desired and shows that more 'cash' is coming in than going out.

Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years): This is the annualized change in cash flow over the last 3-5 years. The change in a longer period helps put the current reading into proper perspective. By looking at the rate, rather than the actual dollar value, the comparison across the industry and peers becomes easier.

Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0): This metric looks at the estimated sales growth for the current year. It is calculated as sales estimate for the current fiscal year (F1) divided by the reported sales for the last completed fiscal year (F0).

Like EPS growth, a higher rate is better for sales growth. A look at a company's projected sales growth instantly tells you what the outlook is for their products and services. However, different sales growth rates are considered good for different industries, so it's better to compare sales growth rates of companies in the same industry group.

EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past week. The change in a company's consensus EPS estimate (or earnings estimate revision) has proven to be strongly correlated with the near-term price movement of its shares. It is an integral part of the Zacks Rank.

If a stock's consensus EPS estimate is $1.10 now versus $1.00 a week ago, that will be reflected as a 10% upward revision. If, on the other hand, it went from $1.00 to 90 cents, that would be a 10% downward revision.

EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past four weeks.

A stock's earnings estimate revision in a 1-week period is important. But it's more meaningful to look at the longer-term revision. And, of course, the 4-week change helps put the 1-week change into proper perspective.

EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past 12 weeks.

This metric essentially shows how the consensus EPS estimate has changed over a period longer than 1 week or 4 weeks.

EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal quarter over the past four weeks.

While the revision in consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year is strongly correlated with the near-term price movement of its shares, the estimate revision for the current fiscal quarter is an important metric as well, especially over the short term, and particularly as a stock approaches its earnings date. If a stock's Q1 EPS estimate decreases ahead of its earnings release, it's usually a negative sign, whereas an increase is a positive sign.