

WEC Energy Group (WEC)

\$97.41 (As of 09/02/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$102.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation:

Neutral

(Since: 03/25/19)

Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5)

3-Hold

Zacks Style Scores:

VGM:D

Value: D

Growth: D

Momentum: F

Summary

WEC Energy's second-quarter 2020 earnings surpassed estimates while its revenues missed the same. The company continues to expand its electric and natural gas customer base, which is likely to boost its sales volume. It also expects long-term earnings and dividend growth in the range of 5-7% per year and projects capital investment to be nearly \$15 billion over the 2020-2024 period. Moreover, it carries strong investment-grade credit ratings, which allow it to enjoy superior creditworthiness in the respective market. It is also focused on becoming net carbon neutral by 2050. Shares of the company have outperformed the industry in the past three months. However, rigid state, local and federal governmental regulations may affect WEC Energy's ability to recover costs. Its dependence on its subsidiaries' financial footing is a concern.

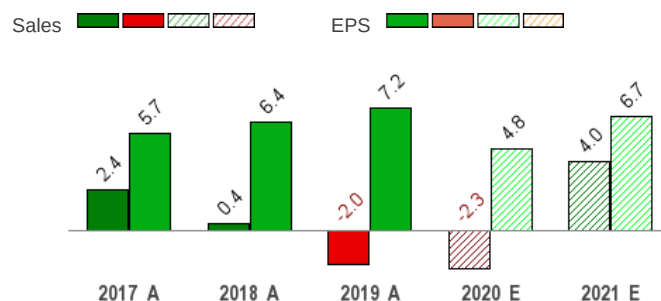
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$109.53 - \$68.01
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	1,058,659
Market Cap	\$30.7 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	5.6%
Beta	0.16
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$2.53 / 2.6%
Industry	Utility - Electric Power
Zacks Industry Rank	Bottom 18% (205 out of 251)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	10.1%
Last Sales Surprise	-3.4%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.0%
Expected Report Date	11/04/2020
Earnings ESP	-0.9%

P/E TTM	26.3
P/E F1	26.1
PEG F1	4.4
P/S TTM	4.3

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021					7,642 E
2020	2,109 A	1,549 A	1,664 E	2,013 E	7,347 E
2019	2,377 A	1,590 A	1,608 A	1,948 A	7,523 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021					\$4.00 E
2020	\$1.43 A	\$0.76 A	\$0.75 E	\$0.85 E	\$3.75 E
2019	\$1.33 A	\$0.74 A	\$0.74 A	\$0.77 A	\$3.58 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 09/02/2020. The reports text is as of 09/03/2020.

Overview

WEC Energy Group is a diversified holding company, engaged in the generation and distribution of electricity in southeastern, east central and northern Wisconsin, as well as in the upper peninsula of Michigan.

The company also distributes natural gas; owns, develops and operates coal, oil, gas and renewable fuel-based electricity generating facilities; and invests in other energy-related entities. It also develops and invests in real estate.

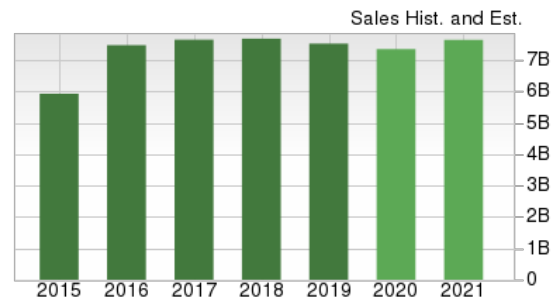
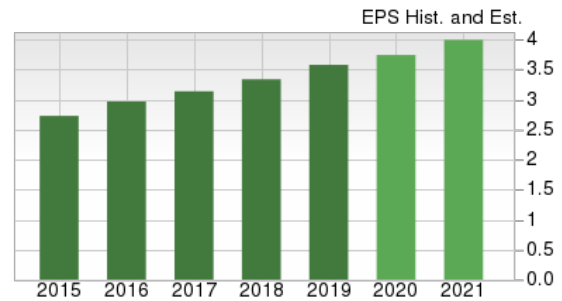
WEC Energy was founded in 1981 and is headquartered in Milwaukee, WI.

On Jun 29, 2015, Wisconsin Energy Corporation announced that it has completed the acquisition of Integrys Energy, forming WEC Energy Group. The major operating headquarters of the combined entity are in Milwaukee, Green Bay and Chicago.

In June 2017, the company completed the acquisition of Bluewater Natural Gas Holding — an operator of underground natural gas storage facility in Michigan.

Currently, the company provides electricity and natural gas to 4.5 million customers (1.6 million electric and 2.9 million gas customers) in Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota through its customer facing brands — We Energies, Wisconsin Public Service, Peoples Gas, North Shore Gas, Michigan Gas Utilities and Minnesota Energy Resources.

The company's other major subsidiary is We Power. Post completion of the acquisition WEC Energy Group has a 60% ownership interest in ATC. The company has 70,600 miles of electric distribution lines and 49,500 miles of gas distribution lines. The company has an asset base of \$35 billion.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ Shares of WEC Energy have returned 5.2% in the past three months against the industry's decline of 7%. Owing to efficient management and proper execution of its plans, WEC Energy delivered strong results and surpassed its earnings guidance in the past 16 years.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the global economy is facing a crisis. In the second quarter, demand from large and small commercial and industrial customers fell due to the extended lockdown but an increase in residential demand, favorable weather and the company's operating efficiency supported its results. So far, the year remains strong for WEC Energy and it is well positioned to deal with uncertainties ahead.

The company continues to benefit from its regional economic developments. For example, the construction of a high-tech campus by Foxconn in south of Milwaukee is underway. Foxconn is expected to invest \$10 billion in this high-tech manufacturing campus. The operations are expected to begin this year. Smart manufacturing facility is also on track to begin in the fourth quarter of this year.

- ▲ Based on improving condition in the company's service area, it continues to witness an uptick in customer growth. At the end of 2019, the company had an additional 10,000 electric and 14,000 natural gas customers compared with the year-ago quarter's level. At the end of the second quarter, the company had an additional 11,000 electric and 27,000 natural gas customers compared with the year-ago quarter's level. The company expects both electric and natural gas sales to improve in the range of 1.2-1.5%, respectively, by the 2022-2024-time frame.

For 2020 to 2024-time frame, the company plans to invest \$15 billion. Of the total investments, the company will spend \$5.7 billion on Gas Distribution, \$2.8 billion on Electric Distribution, \$2.2 billion on Generation, \$1.8 billion on Energy infrastructure, \$1.3 billion on ATC Investment and \$1.2 billion on Technology. The company expects long-term earnings growth in the range of 5-7% per year.

- ▲ WEC Energy, under its "Delivering" the Future initiative is focusing on Natural Gas System Modernization Program, Technology Enhancements, Electric Redesign and Electric Resilience projects. The company's Modernization and Reliability project includes modernization of the electric distribution system and upgrading lines. The company is also working to upgrade and strengthen its natural gas distribution system. It expects to spend \$2.8 billion over the next five years on electric delivery and plans for installing 2,200 miles of underground circuits to replace worrying overhead lines. It plans for \$280-300 million annual average investment on natural gas system modernization program. WEC Energy is focusing on its Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) program across four states it serves and plans to spend \$1.2 billion through 2020-2024.

Moreover, the company is working to maintain reliable and affordable services for its customers. It is seeking an approval for two Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facilities to address demand for additional natural gas supply in Wisconsin. If approved, the construction will begin in the summer of 2021 and will be in service by late 2023. Total investments in the project are expected to be \$370 million. These LNG facilities will provide a solution for Southeastern Wisconsin to meet peak customer demand during the coldest days of the year.

- ▲ WEC Energy is also focused on reducing carbon emissions by approximately 70% below the 2005 levels within 2030 and becoming net carbon neutral by 2050. In 2019, the company met and exceeded its original 2030 goal of curbing carbon emissions by 40% below the 2005 levels. The company also set a plan to reduce methane emissions by approximately 30% below 2011 levels by 2030. It is also evaluating its longer-term carbon reduction goals. In line with this, the company has retired 40% of coal generation since 2014.

The company is investing in cost-effective zero-carbon generation like solar and wind. Three solar projects, each with 100 megawatt (MW) capacity, are expected to be completed by 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. The company is also investing \$1.62 billion in six wind projects. Notably, a new project, Tatanka Ridge Wind Farm, is under development in Deuel County and is expected to come online in early 2021.

- ▲ The utility company has been consistently hiking dividends. In Jan 2020, the company hiked annual dividend rate to \$2.53 that reflects an increase of 7.2% and thereby increasing shareholders' value. WEC Energy projects annual dividends to grow in tandem with its earnings and a payout ratio of 65-70%. The company projected dividend growth in line with earnings growth of 5-7% per year. The company's current dividend yield is pegged at 2.60%, better than the Zacks S&P 500 composite's average yield of 1.47%.
- ▲ As of Jun 30, 2020, the company's long-term debt amounted to \$10,721.6 million compared with \$11,211 million as of Dec 31, 2019. Also, it has \$1.9 billion worth liquidity as of Jul 31, 2020. Its times interest earned ratio at the end of the second quarter improved to 3.7 from 3.6, sequentially. The strong ratio indicates that the firm will be able to meet its debt obligations in the near future without any difficulties. At a time when every entity is looking forward to preserve liquidity amid uncertainties stemming from the COVID-19 outbreak, improving times interest earned ratio of the company is reassuring for investors.

Moreover, WEC Energy carries strong investment-grade credit ratings, ranging between A and A-, which allows it to enjoy superior credit worthiness in the market. This, in turn, allows the company access to cheaper sources of funds for its investment projects.

WEC Energy's ongoing investments in infrastructure projects, focus on clean energy, increase in customer base along with its "Delivering" the Future initiative will drive growth.

Reasons To Sell:

- ▼ The company's operations are subject to significant state, local and federal governmental regulation, including regulation by the various utility commissions in the states where they serve customers. These regulations may affect WEC Energy's ability to recover costs from utility customers as well as cause it to incur substantial compliance and other costs. Moreover, a significant portion of the company's electricity is generated from coal. The emission rules are becoming stricter and the company might incur significant costs to comply with these environmental requirements, including costs associated with the installation of pollution control equipment, environmental monitoring, emission fees and permits at its facilities.
- ▼ WEC Energy, as a holding company, depends on the performance of its subsidiaries to meet financial obligations. These subsidiaries have their own financial obligations to fulfill and might not be able to pay dividend or other desired amounts, compromising WEC Energy's ability to meet its financial obligations.

Dependency upon subsidiaries, significant government regulation and adherence of the same could hurt margins.

Last Earnings Report

WEC Energy Q2 Earnings Beat Estimates, Revenues Miss

WEC Energy delivered second-quarter 2020 earnings per share of 76 cents, which beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate of 69 cents by 10.1%. The bottom line also improved 2.7% from the year-ago quarter's 74 cents per share. This year-over-year outperformance was led by operational efficiency and the warmer-than-normal weather that perked up residential demand for energy.

Revenues

Total revenues of \$1,548.7 million missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate of \$1,603 million by 3.4%. The top line also declined 2.6% from \$1,590.2 million in the year-ago quarter.

Highlights of the Release

Residential use of electricity in the second quarter rose 17.1% year over year. Electricity consumption by small commercial and industrial customers declined 8.6% year over year. Electricity used by large commercial and industrial customers excluding iron ore mines dropped 12.9% on a year-over-year basis. On a weather-normal basis, retail deliveries of electricity excluding the iron ore mine moved down 6.9%.

Natural gas deliveries in Wisconsin excluding gas used for power generation slid 5.5% from the year-ago quarter's figure. On a weather-normal basis, natural gas deliveries fell 7.2%.

Total operating expenses for the second quarter amounted to \$1,209.9 million, indicating a 5.2% decline from the year ago quarter's \$1,275.6 million.

Operating income came in at \$338.8 million, increasing 7.7% from the prior-year period's \$314.6 million.

At the end of the second quarter, the company had an additional 11,000 electric and 27,000 natural gas customers compared with the respective year-ago quarter's levels.

Financial Position

As of Jun 30, 2020, WEC Energy had cash and cash equivalents of \$13.3 million compared with \$37.5 million as of Dec 31, 2019.

As of Jun 30, 2020, the company had long-term debt of \$10,721.6 million compared with \$11,211 million as of Dec 31, 2019.

The company's net cash provided by operating activities at the end of the first half of 2020 was \$1,379.6 million compared with \$1,291.2 million at the end of the comparable period of 2019.

Capital expenditure at the end of the first six months of this year was \$1,037.2 million compared with \$855.2 million at the end of the year-ago period.

2020 Guidance

The company reaffirmed full-year earnings per share projection in the range of \$3.71-\$3.75. The upper end of this current guided range is in line with the Zacks Consensus Estimate.

Quarter Ending	06/2020
Report Date	Aug 04, 2020
Sales Surprise	-3.37%
EPS Surprise	10.14%
Quarterly EPS	0.76
Annual EPS (TTM)	3.70

Recent News

WEC Energy to Buy 85% Stake in Tatanka Ridge Wind Farm for \$235M- July 28, 2020

WEC Energy inked a deal to acquire an 85% ownership interest in Tatanka Ridge Wind Farm, which is under construction in Deuel County, South Dakota for an estimated investment of \$235 million. Commercial operation is likely to begin by early 2021.

The Tatanka Ridge site is expected to have 56 wind turbines with a combined capacity of 155 MW. The project will have long-term offtake agreements for total energy produced with a multinational investment grade company and a well-established electric cooperative that serves utilities in multiple states.

Valuation

WEC Energy shares are up 5.6% in the year to date period, but down 0.2% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Utility sector was down 15.3% and 15.6% in the year to date period, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry is down 12.9% and sector is down 13.6%.

The S&P 500 index is up 3.8% in the year to date period and 14.1% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 24.88X of forward 12 months earnings, which compares to 13.35X for the Zacks sub-industry, 12.38X for the Zacks sector and 23.18X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 27.63X and as low as 16.33X, with a 5-year median of 20X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our \$102 price target reflects 26.05X of forward 12 months earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for WEC

Valuation Multiples -WEC					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	24.88	13.35	12.38	23.18
	5-Year High	27.63	15.36	15.28	23.18
	5-Year Low	16.33	11.07	11.3	15.25
	5-Year Median	20	13.2	13.73	17.6
P/S F12M	Current	4.07	2.25	2.63	3.95
	5-Year High	4.13	2.46	3.29	3.95
	5-Year Low	1.66	1.55	1.75	2.53
	5-Year Median	2.61	1.92	2.08	3.07
P/B TTM	Current	2.94	2.22	4.11	4.53
	5-Year High	3.23	2.32	4.29	4.76
	5-Year Low	1.74	1.29	2.01	2.83
	5-Year Median	2.2	1.6	2.64	3.76

As of 9/2/2020

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Bottom 18% (205 out of 251)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
China Resources Power Holdings Co. (CRPJY)	Outperform	2
Ameren Corporation (AEE)	Neutral	3
Brookfield Infrastructure Partners LP (BIP)	Neutral	3
CMS Energy Corporation (CMS)	Neutral	3
DTE Energy Company (DTE)	Neutral	3
Eversource Energy (ES)	Neutral	3
Fortis Inc. (FTS)	Neutral	3
PPL Corporation (PPL)	Neutral	4

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Utility - Electric Power				Industry Peers		
	WEC	X Industry	S&P 500	AEE	CMS	PPL
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	3	4
VGM Score	D	-	-	C	C	C
Market Cap	30.73 B	8.53 B	24.30 B	19.82 B	17.68 B	21.89 B
# of Analysts	4	3	14	5	5	3
Dividend Yield	2.60%	3.36%	1.6%	2.47%	2.64%	5.83%
Value Score	D	-	-	C	C	B
Cash/Price	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.00	0.09	0.06
EV/EBITDA	15.43	9.53	13.46	12.01	12.61	9.42
PEG F1	4.31	3.52	3.09	3.42	3.33	NA
P/B	2.94	1.63	3.25	2.37	3.37	1.68
P/CF	14.91	7.52	13.12	10.24	10.31	6.67
P/E F1	25.84	17.47	22.15	23.15	23.32	11.80
P/S TTM	4.26	1.82	2.57	3.41	2.66	3.09
Earnings Yield	3.84%	5.69%	4.29%	4.33%	4.29%	8.46%
Debt/Equity	1.02	1.03	0.70	1.22	2.57	1.62
Cash Flow (\$/share)	6.53	4.27	6.93	7.84	5.99	4.27
Growth Score	D	-	-	C	C	D
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	6.65%	5.32%	10.41%	7.41%	7.05%	1.88%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	4.61%	0.36%	-4.75%	3.46%	6.35%	-1.50%
Current Cash Flow Growth	8.12%	6.78%	5.22%	2.50%	6.78%	7.26%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	15.13%	6.02%	8.49%	6.59%	7.74%	3.35%
Current Ratio	0.49	0.86	1.35	0.81	1.13	0.63
Debt/Capital	50.54%	50.68%	42.92%	54.86%	71.97%	61.79%
Net Margin	16.26%	10.02%	10.25%	14.57%	11.33%	24.52%
Return on Equity	11.36%	9.64%	14.66%	10.27%	15.32%	14.20%
Sales/Assets	0.21	0.22	0.50	0.20	0.24	0.15
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	-2.34%	0.00%	-1.42%	1.13%	-1.37%	3.44%
Momentum Score	F	-	-	C	C	B
Daily Price Change	4.08%	1.95%	1.82%	2.23%	2.56%	3.83%
1-Week Price Change	1.77%	0.00%	2.59%	-2.55%	-0.56%	-1.14%
4-Week Price Change	4.39%	0.42%	4.80%	-0.27%	-0.95%	7.03%
12-Week Price Change	3.95%	0.12%	6.31%	7.17%	3.11%	2.23%
52-Week Price Change	-0.25%	-11.48%	5.43%	2.22%	-4.22%	-4.08%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	1,058,659	297,914	1,788,967	1,036,337	1,800,178	5,102,417
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.12%	0.00%	-0.41%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	0.54%	0.00%	3.89%	0.76%	2.07%	-0.28%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	-0.44%	0.00%	0.00%	-0.81%	17.11%	3.03%

Source: Zacks Investment Research

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	D
Growth Score	D
Momentum Score	F
VGM Score	D

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.

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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 medium-term 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 most recent 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.