Jun 23, 2021

Essential Utilities (WTRG)

$46.82 (As of 06/22/21)

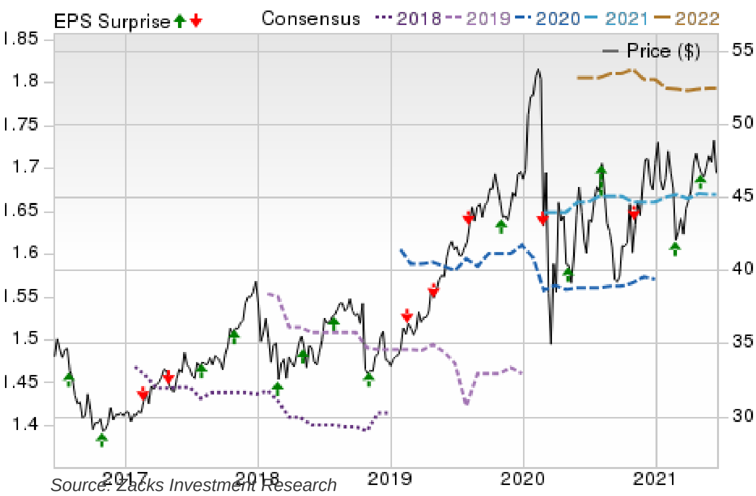
Price Target (6-12 Months): **$49.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months	**Zacks Recommendation:** (Since: 11/06/18) Prior Recommendation: Underperform	**Neutral**
Short Term: 1-3 Months	**Zacks Rank:** (1-5)	**3-Hold**
	Zacks Style Scores:	VGM:C
	Value: C | Growth: B | Momentum: C	

Summary

Essential Utilities continues to expand its operations through acquisitions, organic means and benefits from the increasing customer base. Planned investment is also assisting the company to expand and strengthen its water and natural gas infrastructure. Consistent performance allows Essential Utilities to increase dividend rate. Debt management is helping it lower weighted average cost of fixed rate long-term debt. It has enough liquidity to meet its debt obligations. However,shares of the company have underperformed the industry in the past six months. Similar to other utilities, the company's performance gets impacted by unfavorable weather conditions that reduce the demand for water and natural gas. Contamination of water supplied and breakage in pipelines might result in the disruption of water services and impact operations.

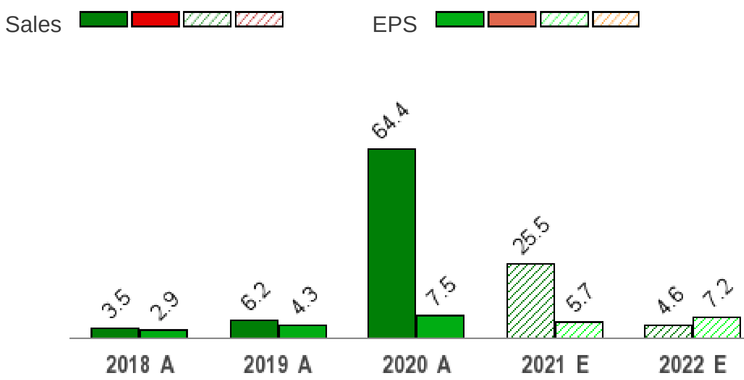
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	**$49.36 - $38.28**
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	**739,935**
Market Cap	**$11.5 B**
Year-To-Date Price Change	**-1.0%**
Beta	**0.53**
Dividend / Dividend Yield	**$1.00 / 2.1%**
Industry	**Utility - Water Supply**
Zacks Industry Rank	**Bottom 15% (214 out of 252)**
Last EPS Surprise	**9.1%**
Last Sales Surprise	**-16.6%**
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	**0.0%**
Expected Report Date	**08/04/2021**
Earnings ESP	**0.0%**
P/E TTM	**27.5**
P/E F1	**28.0**
PEG F1	**4.4**
P/S TTM	**6.4**

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Sales Estimates (millions of $)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	617 E	403 E	382 E	517 E	1,920 E
2021	584 A	388 E	367 E	497 E	1,836 E
2020	256 A	384 A	349 A	474 A	1,463 A

EPS Estimates

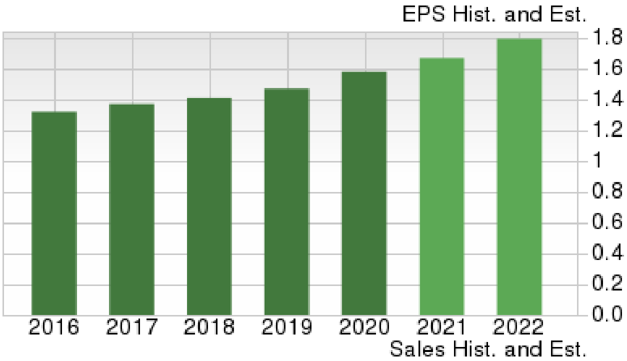
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	$0.68 E	$0.30 E	$0.28 E	$0.52 E	$1.79 E
2021	$0.72 A	$0.28 E	$0.26 E	$0.43 E	$1.67 E
2020	$0.60 A	$0.29 A	$0.23 A	$0.46 A	$1.58 A

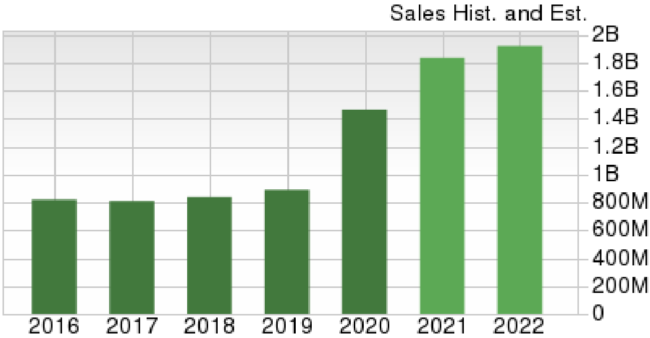
*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and sales estimates, is as of 06/22/2021. The report's text and the analyst-provided price target are as of 06/23/2021.

Overview

Bryn Mawr, PA-based Essential Utilities, Inc. — through its subsidiaries — operates regulated utilities that provide water, wastewater and natural gas services in the United States. The company provides utility services to nearly five million people in the United States. Essential Utilities completed the acquisition of Peoples Gas on Mar 16, 2020 and began to provide natural gas services, in addition to water and wastewater services. Prior to its name change on Feb 3, 2020, Essential Utilities was known as Aqua America, Inc.



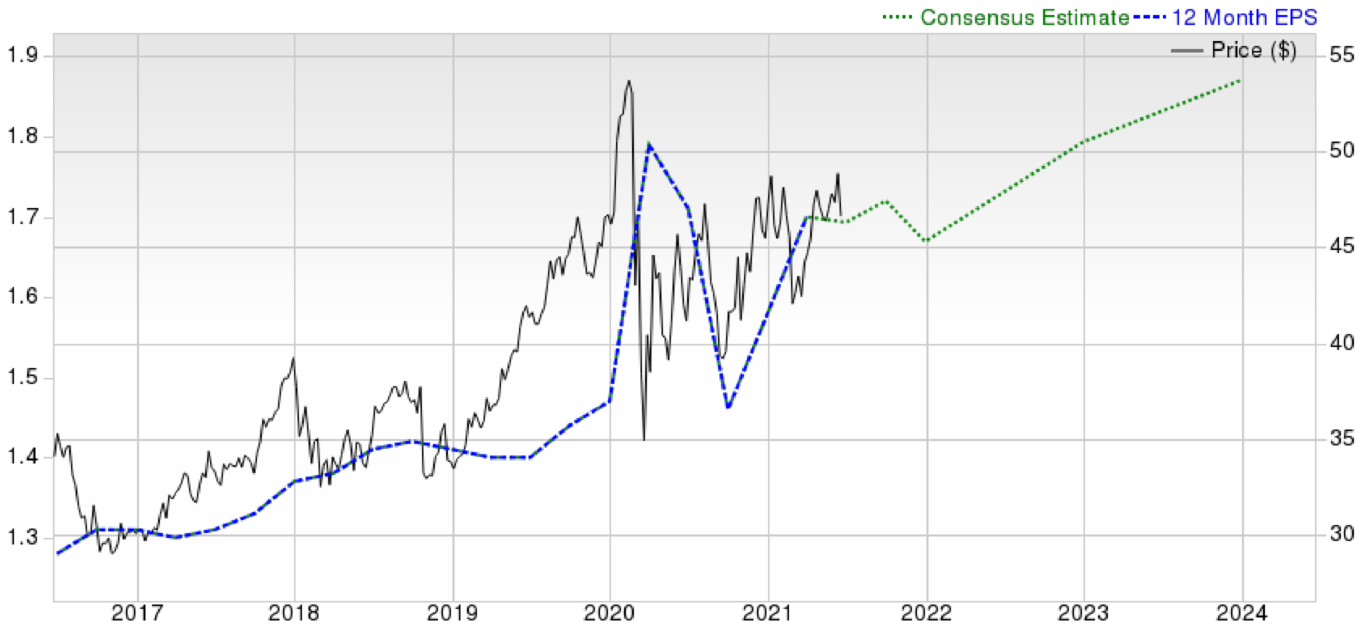


Essential Utilities has identified 12 operating segments and two reportable segments, namely Regulated Water as well as Regulated Natural Gas. The Regulated Water segment is comprised of eight operating segments for its water and wastewater regulated utility companies, and the Regulated Natural Gas segment includes one operating segment representing natural gas utility companies. In addition to the two reportable segments, the company includes three of its operating segments in Other. The Other segment represents non-regulated natural gas operations, Aqua Resources and Aqua Infrastructure.

For 2020, Regulated Water, Regulated Natural Gas, and Other contributed 64.2%, 34.6% and 1.2%, respectively, to total revenues.

The company was successful expanding the customer base each year during the 2016-2020 time period, courtesy of systematic acquisitions, partnerships with developers and organic growth of operations.

Essential Utilities' water supplies are primarily self supplied and processed at 22 surface water treatment plants located in four states, as well as numerous well stations in the states in which it conducts business. Only 5.9% of its water supplies are provided through water purchased from other water suppliers.



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Reasons To Buy:

Steady capital investment, strategic municipal assets acquisitions, customer additions, proper debt management and organic growth are tailwinds.

▲ Massive infrastructural investments are required to upgrade and maintain the water utilities, as old and soiled water pipelines are quickly nearing their effective service life. Similarly, the company also has plans to make the necessary investments to strengthen its natural gas infrastructure. Essential will replace nearly 1,000 miles of old water and natural pipelines to increase the resilience of operations. In 2021, the company aims to invest $550 million in the water segment and $450 million in the natural gas segment. It expects earnings per share to improve at a 5-7% CAGR over the 2020-2023 time period.

Essential Utilities will continue to make systematic investments to strengthen its water, wastewater and natural gas infrastructure. The company plans to invest $3 billion from 2021 through 2023 to fortify operations and efficiently serve the expanding customer base.

▲ Rate hike application and approval from the commission help the company to recoup expenditure and fund future capital projects. Rate cases completed in 2020 increased its top line by $21 million on an annual basis and water rates completed in 2021 will increase annual revenues by $13.5 million. The pending water rates, on completion, are expected to further increase annual revenues by $1.7 million.

Rate hikes completed in the natural gas segment increased its annual revenues by $1 million in 2020. Gas rates completed in 2021 will increase annual revenues by $1.1 million. Essential Utilities does not have any pending natural gas rates cases.

▲ Consolidation is the need of the hour in the fragmented U.S. water utility space. Consolidation will enable big utilities to make the necessary infrastructure overhauls that have become imperative for the industry at large. In the United Sates, the majority of water and wastewater services are provided by the municipalities and the company is actively exploring opportunities to expand utility operations through the acquisition of municipal assets. During 2020, the company closed four municipal acquisitions, which added 12,184 new customers. During the five-year period ended Dec 31, 2020, Essential Utilities expanded utility operations by completing 46 acquisitions of water or wastewater utilities, which in turn added 87,000 new customers.

It intends to continue pursuing acquisitions of government owned, and regulated water and wastewater systems that provide services in areas near its existing, as well as new service areas. At present, there are seven pending acquisition deals, which, when completed, will add 230,905 new customers to the existing customer base. The company expects the water and wastewater customer base to increase 2-3% year over year in 2021 through acquisitions along with organic means. However, gas customer volumes are expected to remain stable in 2021.

▲ Essential continues to increase the value of shareholders through annual increase in dividend. The company has been paying dividends for the past 76 years. Its dividend rate hike approval by the board of directors on Aug 4, 2020 marked the 30th consecutive year of dividend increase in the past 29 years. Consistent performance of the company allows it to continue with shareholder-friendly moves.

Its current dividend yield is 2.14%, which is better than the industry's 1.61%. The company aims to keep the dividend payout ratio in the range of 60-65%. The company paid $61.5 million as dividend during first-quarter 2021, up from $52.2 million paid in the year-ago period.

▲ Total debt to capital was 54.2% for first-quarter 2021, down 60 basis points from 54.8% at the end of fourth-quarter 2020. Efficient debt management resulted in the decrease in the weighted average cost of fixed rate long-term debt. The weighted average cost dropped to 3.62% on Apr 30, 2021 from 4.09% as of Dec 31, 2019.

The times interest earned ratio at first quarter-end was 3.0, improving sequentially from 2020-end level of 2.4. This indicates that it has enough liquidity to meet debt obligations without any difficulty and its stable times interest earned ratio is reassuring for investors.

Reasons To Sell:

Risk of water contamination, compliance with stricter regulations and fluctuating weather conditions impacting the demand for water are headwinds.

- Water utilities always run the risk of contamination of water supplied to its customers, despite implementing the best safety measures. The contamination of water supplied could result in disruption of water services, and result in extra cost for water quality testing and monitoring, treatment of the contaminated source, or the purchase of alternative water supplies.The stock has gained 3% in the past six months compared with the industry's 3.7% growth.

- Weather continues to play a significant role in determining the demand for water and natural gas. Also, new water conservation methods used by customers have reduced the demand for water. If the weather is cooler in winter months and its service areas receive more rainfall than normal, the demand for water will fall and its performance will be adversely impacted. Weather also has a very direct impact on gas consumption and associated revenues.

- The water utility business is capital intensive and requires steady capital investments to maintain, upgrade, as well as replace the old and soiled water pipelines. Though the rate cuts are favorable for overall development, any disruption in capital markets and unfavorable occurrence therein might make it difficult for Essential Utilities to raise funds at a favorable rate. This can impact the company's business and financial conditions. If Essential Utilities fails to obtain sufficient funds, it might have to curtail essential capital expenditures or lower the dividend payment rate to conserve cash.

- Water utilities are subject to certain federal and state environmental laws, as well as regulations. With environmental regulations getting stricter day by day, compliance could result in significantly higher operating costs for the company. Essential Utilities is involved in various disputes, claims, lawsuits, and other regulatory as well as legal matters, including both asserted and unasserted legal claims in the ordinary course of business. The final outcome of these loss contingencies cannot be predicted with certainty and unfavorable outcomes could negatively impact the company.

Last Earnings Report

Essential Q1 Earnings Beat Estimates, Revenues Lag

Quarter Ending	03/2021
Report Date	May 05, 2021
Sales Surprise	-16.63%
EPS Surprise	9.09%
Quarterly EPS	0.72
Annual EPS (TTM)	1.70

Essential Utilities Inc. reported first-quarter 2021 earnings per share of 72 cents, which surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 9.1%. The reported earnings were 20% higher than 60 cents per share recorded in the year-ago quarter.

GAAP earnings per share for the reported quarter were 72 cents compared with 20 cents in the year-ago period.

Total Revenues

First-quarter revenues of $583.6 million were up 128.3% year over year. The year-over-year improvement in total revenues was due to contribution from its acquired natural gas assets, increased volume, growth and rate along with surcharge increases in the regulated water segment.

However, revenues for the reported quarter missed the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 16.6%.

Highlights of the Release

The company continues to expand operations through strategic acquisitions. The pipeline of potential water and wastewater municipal acquisitions that it is actively pursuing represents nearly 395,000 total customers or equivalent dwelling units.

To date in 2021, the regulated water segment received rate awards in different jurisdictions that led to an increase in annualized revenues of the company by $13.5 million. Essential's regulated natural gas segment has received rate awards or infrastructure surcharges in Pennsylvania and Kentucky, estimated to increase annualized revenues by $1.1 million. The company currently has a proceeding pending in Virginia for the regulated water segment, which would add an estimated $1.7 million in incremental revenues.

Operation and maintenance expenses increased 17.3% year over year to $125.1 million. This was primarily due to an increase in Peoples transaction-related costs.

Operating income for the reported quarter was $232.4 million, up 216.2% year over year.

Interest expenses increased 44.7% to $50.8 million from $35.1 million in the year-ago quarter.

Financial Highlights

Current assets were $348.1 million as of Mar 31, 2021 compared with $380.2 million as of Dec 31, 2020. Long-term debt was $5,547.9 million as of Mar 31, 2021, higher than $5,507.8 million on Dec 31, 2020

Essential invested $178 million in the first three months of 2021 to improve regulated water and natural gas infrastructure systems. The company remains on track to invest nearly $1 billion in 2021 to replace and expand its water and wastewater utility infrastructure as well as replace and upgrade its natural gas utility infrastructure.

Guidance

The company reaffirmed its 2021 earnings guidance in the range of $1.64-$1.69 per share. The mid-point of the earnings guidance is on par with the corresponding Zacks Consensus Estimate of $1.67 per share.

It expects the customer base from the water segment to expand 2-3% on the back of acquisitions and organic customer growth.

The company plans to invest $550 million in the regulated water segment and $450 million in the regulated gas segment in 2021. This capital expenditure is part of its total investment plan of $3 billion through 2023.

Valuation

Essential Utilities, shares are down 1% in the year-to-date period, and up 12.4% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry is up 1.7% and the Zacks Utility sector was up 1.7% in theyear-to-date period. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry is up 12.9% and sector was up 11.8%.

The S&P 500 index is up 13.9% in the year-to-date period but up 41.3% in the past year.

The stock is currently trading at 27.09X of forward 12 months earnings, which compares to 18.3X for the Zacks sub-industry, 13.7X for the Zacks sector and 21.7X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 33.61X and as low as 20.64X, with a 5-year median of 24.97X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our $49 price target reflects 28.35X of forward 12 months earnings.

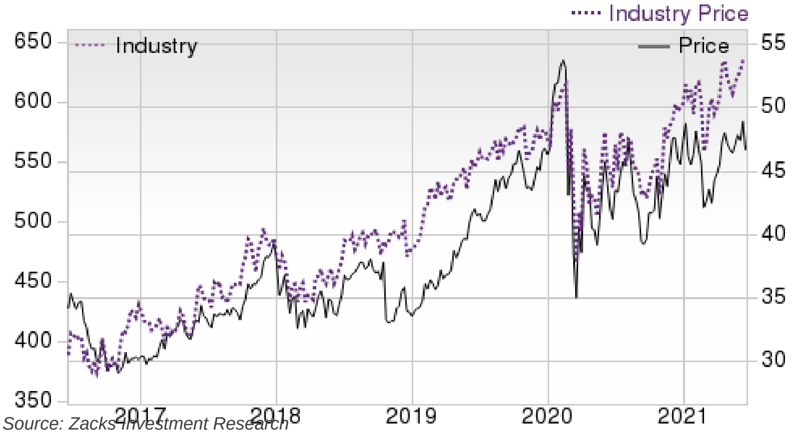
The table below shows summary valuation data for WTRG

Valuation Multiples - WTRG

		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	27.09	18.3	13.7	21.7
	5-Year High	33.61	25.2	15.34	23.83
	5-Year Low	20.64	16.83	11.37	15.31
	5-Year Median	24.97	18.64	13.82	18.05
P/S F12M	Current	6.13	7.47	2.84	4.72
	5-Year High	11.38	7.74	3.17	4.74
	5-Year Low	4.53	2.49	1.78	3.21
	5-Year Median	6.66	4.16	2.2	3.72
P/B TTM	Current	2.39	4.18	3.67	7.07
	5-Year High	4.54	4.37	3.87	7.08
	5-Year Low	1.82	2.5	2.26	3.84
	5-Year Median	2.96	3.11	2.62	5.02

As of 6/22/2021 *Source: Zacks Investment Research*

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Bottom 15% (214 out of 252)



Source: Zacks Investment Research

Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
American Water Works Company, Inc. **(AWK)**	Neutral	3
American States Water Company **(AWR)**	Neutral	3
Consolidated Water Co. Ltd. **(CWCO)**	Neutral	3
California Water Service Group **(CWT)**	Neutral	3
Middlesex Water Company **(MSEX)**	Neutral	4
Primo Water Corporation **(PRMW)**	Neutral	3
The York Water Company **(YORW)**	Neutral	4
SJW Group **(SJW)**	Underperform	4

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

Industry Comparison Industry: Utility - Water Supply

Industry Peers

	WTRG	X Industry	S&P 500	CWT	PRMW	SJW
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Neutral	-	-	Neutral	Neutral	Underperform
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	3	-	-	3	3	4
VGM Score	C	-	-	C	B	B
Market Cap	11.50 B	1.70 B	30.14 B	2.88 B	2.67 B	1.92 B
# of Analysts	7	1.5	12	4	2	2
Dividend Yield	2.14%	1.61%	1.35%	1.62%	0.72%	2.11%
Value Score	C	-	-	C	B	B
Cash/Price	0.00	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.01
EV/EBITDA	23.97	20.49	17.08	14.67	28.86	14.86
PEG F1	4.35	4.59	2.05	NA	NA	NA
P/B	2.39	2.20	4.08	3.10	1.99	1.96
P/CF	17.40	15.82	17.37	14.25	9.68	11.83
P/E F1	27.56	32.68	20.93	32.15	25.09	32.68
P/S TTM	6.42	6.25	3.37	3.53	1.36	3.40
Earnings Yield	3.57%	3.06%	4.67%	3.11%	3.99%	3.06%
Debt/Equity	1.15	0.84	0.66	0.84	0.99	1.33
Cash Flow ($/share)	2.69	2.30	6.83	3.98	1.71	5.44
Growth Score	B	-	-	C	C	C
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	5.72%	7.17%	9.59%	10.75%	81.09%	-5.81%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	5.61%	5.47%	21.62%	-10.53%	20.00%	-7.94%
Current Cash Flow Growth	57.19%	8.68%	0.99%	27.73%	59.56%	30.52%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	13.41%	12.52%	7.28%	12.70%	13.50%	14.15%
Current Ratio	0.69	0.84	1.39	0.46	0.81	0.43
Debt/Capital	53.56%	45.71%	41.51%	45.65%	49.71%	57.12%
Net Margin	23.27%	18.63%	11.95%	13.98%	-7.43%	10.95%
Return on Equity	9.23%	10.56%	16.48%	12.95%	5.43%	6.78%
Sales/Assets	0.13	0.16	0.51	0.24	0.54	0.17
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	25.52%	2.41%	9.48%	-1.42%	5.64%	1.36%
Momentum Score	C	-	-	D	B	B
Daily Price Change	-1.43%	-0.36%	0.51%	-0.49%	0.61%	-0.23%
1-Week Price Change	-4.56%	-4.55%	0.00%	-4.71%	-9.50%	-3.40%
4-Week Price Change	-0.93%	0.44%	1.39%	-0.02%	-4.00%	1.55%
12-Week Price Change	6.05%	5.07%	7.27%	1.69%	2.03%	3.01%
52-Week Price Change	12.44%	18.48%	35.61%	23.46%	13.50%	5.28%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	739,935	149,391	1,876,146	155,413	1,290,461	67,723
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%	0.03%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	0.26%	0.00%	3.59%	0.14%	7.25%	-12.06%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	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	C
VGM Score	C

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.