

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
(Release No. 34- 92196; File No. SR-CboeBZX-2021-019)

June 16, 2021

Self-Regulatory Organizations; Cboe BZX Exchange, Inc.; Order Instituting Proceedings to Determine Whether to Approve or Disapprove a Proposed Rule Change to List and Trade Shares of the VanEck Bitcoin Trust under BZX Rule 14.11(e)(4), Commodity-Based Trust Shares

On March 1, 2021, Cboe BZX Exchange, Inc. (“BZX” or “Exchange”) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“Commission”), pursuant to Section 19(b)(1) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (“Act”)¹ and Rule 19b-4 thereunder,² a proposed rule change to list and trade shares (“Shares”) of the VanEck Bitcoin Trust (“Trust”) under BZX Rule 14.11(e)(4), Commodity-Based Trust Shares. The proposed rule change was published for comment in the Federal Register on March 19, 2021.³

On April 28, 2021, pursuant to Section 19(b)(2) of the Act,⁴ the Commission designated a longer period within which to approve the proposed rule change, disapprove the proposed rule change, or institute proceedings to determine whether to disapprove the proposed rule change.⁵ This order institutes proceedings under Section 19(b)(2)(B) of the Act⁶ to determine whether to approve or disapprove the proposed rule change.

¹ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(1).

² 17 CFR 240.19b-4.

³ See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 91326 (March 15, 2021), 86 FR 14987 (“Notice”). Comments on the proposed rule change can be found at: <https://www.sec.gov/comments/sr-cboebzx-2021-019/srcboebzx2021019.htm>.

⁴ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(2).

⁵ See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 91695, 86 FR 24066 (May 5, 2021). The Commission designated June 17, 2021, as the date by which it should approve, disapprove, or institute proceedings to determine whether to disapprove the proposed rule change.

⁶ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(2)(B).

I. Summary of the Proposal

As described in more detail in the Notice,⁷ the Exchange proposes to list and trade the Shares of the Trust under BZX Rule 14.11(e)(4), which governs the listing and trading of Commodity-Based Trust Shares on the Exchange.

The investment objective of the Trust would be for the Shares to reflect the performance of the MVIS® CryptoCompare Bitcoin Benchmark Rate (“Benchmark”), less the expenses of the Trust’s operations.⁸ The Benchmark will be used to calculate the Trust’s net asset value (“NAV”). The Benchmark is designed to be a price for bitcoin in USD and there is no component other than bitcoin in the Benchmark. The current platform composition of the Benchmark is Bitstamp, Coinbase, Gemini, itBit and Kraken. In calculating the Benchmark, the methodology captures trade prices and sizes from platforms and examines twenty three-minute periods leading up to 4:00 p.m. E.T. It then calculates an equal-weighted average of the volume-weighted median price of these twenty three-minute periods, removing the highest and lowest contributed prices.⁹

Each Share will represent a fractional undivided beneficial interest in the Trust’s net assets. The Trust’s assets will consist of bitcoin held by the Custodian on behalf of the Trust. The

⁷ See Notice, supra note 3.

⁸ VanEck Digital Assets, LLC is the sponsor of the Trust, and Delaware Trust Company is the trustee. The State Street Bank and Trust Company will be the administrator (“Administrator”) and transfer agent. Van Eck Securities Corporation will be the marketing agent in connection with the creation and redemption of Shares. Van Eck Securities Corporation provides assistance in the marketing of the Shares. A third-party regulated custodian (“Custodian”) will be responsible for custody of the Trust’s bitcoin. See Notice, supra note 3, 86 FR at 14995.

⁹ See id. at 14995-96.

Trust generally does not intend to hold cash or cash equivalents. However, there may be situations where the Trust will unexpectedly hold cash on a temporary basis.¹⁰

The Administrator will determine the NAV and NAV per Share of the Trust on each day that the Exchange is open for regular trading, as promptly as practical after 4:00 p.m. E.T. The NAV of the Trust is the aggregate value of the Trust's assets less its estimated accrued but unpaid liabilities (which include accrued expenses). In determining the Trust's NAV, the Administrator values the bitcoin held by the Trust based on the price set by the Benchmark as of 4:00 p.m. E.T.¹¹

The Trust will provide information regarding the Trust's bitcoin holdings, as well as an Intraday Indicative Value ("IIV") per Share updated every 15 seconds, as calculated by the Exchange or a third-party financial data provider during the Exchange's Regular Trading Hours (9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. E.T.). The IIV will be calculated by using the prior day's closing NAV per Share as a base and updating that value during Regular Trading Hours to reflect changes in the value of the Trust's bitcoin holdings during the trading day.¹²

When the Trust sells or redeems its Shares, it will do so in "in-kind" transactions in blocks of 50,000 Shares at the Trust's NAV. Authorized participants will deliver, or facilitate the delivery of, bitcoin to the Trust's account with the Custodian in exchange for Shares when they purchase Shares, and the Trust, through the Custodian, will deliver bitcoin to such authorized participants when they redeem Shares with the Trust.¹³

¹⁰ See id. at 14995.

¹¹ See id. at 14996.

¹² See id.

¹³ See id. at 14995.

II. Proceedings to Determine Whether to Approve or Disapprove SR-CboeBZX-2021-019 and Grounds for Disapproval under Consideration

The Commission is instituting proceedings pursuant to Section 19(b)(2)(B) of the Act¹⁴ to determine whether the proposed rule change should be approved or disapproved. Institution of proceedings is appropriate at this time in view of the legal and policy issues raised by the proposed rule change, as discussed below. Institution of proceedings does not indicate that the Commission has reached any conclusions with respect to any of the issues involved. Rather, as described below, the Commission seeks and encourages interested persons to provide comments on the proposed rule change.

Pursuant to Section 19(b)(2)(B) of the Act,¹⁵ the Commission is providing notice of the grounds for disapproval under consideration. The Commission is instituting proceedings to allow for additional analysis of the proposed rule change's consistency with Section 6(b)(5) of the Act, which requires, among other things, that the rules of a national securities exchange be "designed to prevent fraudulent and manipulative acts and practices" and "to protect investors and the public interest."¹⁶

The Commission asks that commenters address the sufficiency of the Exchange's statements in support of the proposal, which are set forth in the Notice,¹⁷ in addition to any other comments they may wish to submit about the proposed rule change. In particular, the Commission seeks comment on the following questions and asks commenters to submit data where appropriate to support their views:

¹⁴ 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(2)(B).

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ 15 U.S.C. 78f(b)(5).

¹⁷ See Notice, supra note 3.

1. What are commenters' views on whether the proposed Trust and Shares would be susceptible to manipulation? What are commenters' views generally on whether the Exchange's proposal is designed to prevent fraudulent and manipulative acts and practices? What are commenters' views generally with respect to the liquidity and transparency of the bitcoin markets, the bitcoin markets' susceptibility to manipulation, and thus the suitability of bitcoin as an underlying asset for an exchange-traded product?
2. What are commenters' views of the Exchange's assertion that regulatory and financial landscapes relating to bitcoin and other digital assets have changed significantly since 2016?¹⁸ Are the changes that the Exchange identifies sufficient to support the determination that the proposed listing and trading of the Shares are consistent with the Act?
3. The Exchange states that "approving this proposal . . . [would] allow U.S. investors with access to bitcoin in a regulated and transparent exchange-traded vehicle that would act to limit risk" associated with retail exposure through other means.¹⁹ Further, the Exchange asserts that "the manipulation concerns previously articulated by the Commission are sufficiently mitigated to the point that they are outweighed by quantifiable investor protection issues."²⁰ What are commenters' view regarding such an assertion?
4. According to the Exchange, "[n]early every measurable metric related to [Chicago Mercantile Exchange's] Bitcoin Futures has trended consistently up since launch and/or accelerated upward in the past year."²¹ Based on data provided and the academic research cited

¹⁸ See id. at 14989.

¹⁹ See id. at 14990.

²⁰ See id. at 14994.

²¹ See id. at 14991.

by the Exchange, do commenters agree that the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (“CME”) now represents a regulated market of significant size?²² What are commenters’ views on whether there is a reasonable likelihood that a person attempting to manipulate the Shares would also have to trade on CME to manipulate the Shares? What of the Exchange’s assertion that the combination of (a) CME bitcoin futures leading price discovery; (b) the overall size of the bitcoin market; and (c) the ability for market participants to buy or sell large amounts of bitcoin without significant market impact helps to prevent the Shares from becoming the predominant force on pricing in either the bitcoin spot or CME bitcoin futures markets?²³

5. What are commenters’ views on the Exchange’s statement, generally, that bitcoin is resistant to price manipulation and that other means to prevent fraudulent and manipulative acts and practices exist to justify dispensing with the requisite surveillance sharing agreement with a regulated market of significant size related to bitcoin?²⁴ What of the Exchange’s assertion in support of such statement that significant liquidity in the spot market and the decreasing impact of market orders on the overall price of bitcoin mean that attempting to move the price of bitcoin is costly?²⁵ What of the assertion that offering only in-kind creations and redemptions provides unique protections against potential attempts to manipulate the Shares and that the price the Sponsor uses to value the Trust’s bitcoin “is not particularly important”?²⁶

²² See id. at 14989.

²³ See id. at 14995.

²⁴ See id. at 14994 n.54.

²⁵ See id. at 14995.

²⁶ See id. at 14999.

III. Procedure: Request for Written Comments

The Commission requests that interested persons provide written submissions of their views, data, and arguments with respect to the issues identified above, as well as any other concerns they may have with the proposal. In particular, the Commission invites the written views of interested persons concerning whether the proposal is consistent with Section 6(b)(5) or any other provision of the Act, and the rules and regulations thereunder. Although there do not appear to be any issues relevant to approval or disapproval that would be facilitated by an oral presentation of views, data, and arguments, the Commission will consider, pursuant to Rule 19b-4, any request for an opportunity to make an oral presentation.²⁷

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views, and arguments regarding whether the proposal should be approved or disapproved by [insert date 21 days from publication in the Federal Register]. Any person who wishes to file a rebuttal to any other person's submission must file that rebuttal by [insert date 35 days from publication in the Federal Register].

Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

Electronic comments:

- Use the Commission's Internet comment form (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>); or
- Send an e-mail to rule-comments@sec.gov. Please include File Number SR-CboeBZX-2021-019 on the subject line.

²⁷ Section 19(b)(2) of the Act, as amended by the Securities Act Amendments of 1975, Pub. L. 94-29 (June 4, 1975), grants the Commission flexibility to determine what type of proceeding—either oral or notice and opportunity for written comments—is appropriate for consideration of a particular proposal by a self-regulatory organization. See Securities Act Amendments of 1975, Senate Comm. on Banking, Housing & Urban Affairs, S. Rep. No. 75, 94th Cong., 1st Sess. 30 (1975).

Paper comments:

- Send paper comments in triplicate to Secretary, Securities and Exchange Commission, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549-1090.

All submissions should refer to File Number SR-CboeBZX-2021-019. This file number should be included on the subject line if e-mail is used. To help the Commission process and review your comments more efficiently, please use only one method. The Commission will post all comments on the Commission's Internet website (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>). Copies of the submission, all subsequent amendments, all written statements with respect to the proposed rule change that are filed with the Commission, and all written communications relating to the proposed rule change between the Commission and any person, other than those that may be withheld from the public in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552, will be available for website viewing and printing in the Commission's Public Reference Room, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549 on official business days between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Copies of the filing also will be available for inspection and copying at the principal office of the Exchange. All comments received will be posted without change. Persons submitting comments are cautioned that we do not redact or edit personal identifying information from comment submissions. You should submit only information that you wish to make available publicly. All

submissions should refer to File Number SR-CboeBZX-2021-019 and should be submitted by [insert date 21 days from date of publication in the Federal Register]. Rebuttal comments should be submitted by [insert date 35 days from date of publication in the Federal Register].

For the Commission, by the Division of Trading and Markets, pursuant to delegated authority.²⁸

J. Matthew DeLesDernier
Assistant Secretary

²⁸ 17 CFR 200.30-3(a)(57).