

## Evaluation and Approval of Advisory Contract – August 2022

### **FEDERATED HERMES U.S. STRATEGIC DIVIDEND ETF (THE “FUND”)**

At its meetings in August 2022 (the “August Meetings”), the Fund’s Board of Trustees (the “Board”), including those Trustees who are not “interested persons” of the Fund (the “Independent Trustees”), as defined in the Investment Company Act of 1940, as amended (the “1940 Act”), reviewed and unanimously approved for an initial two-year term a proposed investment advisory contract (the “Contract”) between the Fund and Federated Equity Management Company of Pennsylvania (the “Adviser”). The Board’s determination to approve the Contract reflects the exercise of its business judgment regarding whether to authorize the creation and offering of this new investment vehicle, as proposed by Federated Hermes, Inc. (together with its affiliates, “Federated Hermes”), and is based on information requested by the Board and provided by Federated Hermes, as well as Federated Hermes’ recommendation to go forward with development of the Fund. The information, factors and conclusions that formed the basis for the Board’s approval are summarized below.

### ***Information Received and Review Process***

At the request of the Independent Trustees, the Fund’s Chief Compliance Officer (the “CCO”) furnished to the Board in advance of its August Meetings an independent written evaluation presenting on the topics discussed below. The Board considered the CCO’s independent written evaluation (the “New Fund CCO Fee Evaluation Report”), along with other information, in evaluating the reasonableness of the Fund’s proposed management fee and in determining to approve the Contract. The CCO, in preparing the New Fund CCO Fee Evaluation Report, has the authority to retain consultants, experts or staff as reasonably necessary to assist in the performance of his duties, reports directly to the Board, and can be terminated only with the approval of a majority of the Independent Trustees.

In addition to the extensive materials that comprise and accompany the New Fund CCO Fee Evaluation Report, the Board considered the materials and presentations provided by Federated Hermes and the CCO’s independent written evaluation in connection with the Board’s annual approval of the continuation of the advisory and subadvisory contracts for the other funds advised by the Adviser and its affiliates (each, a “Federated Hermes Fund”) at its May 2022 meetings. The Board also considered such additional matters as the Independent Trustees deemed reasonably necessary to evaluate the proposed Contract, which included detailed information about the Federated Hermes Funds and Federated Hermes furnished to the Board at its meetings throughout the year and in between regularly scheduled meetings on particular matters as the need arose.

The Board’s consideration of the Contract included review of materials and information covering the following matters, among others: the nature, quality and extent of the advisory and other services to be provided to the Fund by the Adviser and its affiliates; Federated Hermes’ business and operations; the Adviser’s investment philosophy, personnel and processes; the Fund’s proposed investment objective and strategies; the Fund’s anticipated fees and expenses, including the proposed management fee and the overall estimated expense structure of the Fund (both in absolute terms and relative to a group of its peer funds), with due regard for contractual or voluntary expense limitations (if any); the financial condition of Federated Hermes; the Adviser’s projected profitability with respect to the Fund; anticipated distribution and sales activity for the Fund; and the use and allocation of brokerage commissions to be derived from trading the Fund’s portfolio securities (if any). The Board also considered the likely preferences and expectations of anticipated Fund shareholders, and the continuing state of competition in the registered fund industry and market practices, and relevant developments in the registered fund industry and how the Federated Hermes Funds and/or Federated Hermes may be responding to them.

The Board also considered judicial decisions concerning allegedly excessive investment advisory fees charged to other registered funds in determining to approve the Contract. Using these judicial decisions as a guide, the Board observed that the following factors may be relevant to an adviser’s fiduciary duty with respect to its receipt of compensation from a fund: (1) the nature and quality of the services provided by the adviser to the fund and its shareholders, including the performance of the fund, its benchmark, and comparable funds; (2) the adviser’s cost of providing the services and the profitability to the adviser of providing advisory services to the fund; (3) the extent to which the adviser may realize “economies of scale” as the fund grows larger and, if such economies of scale exist, whether they have been appropriately shared with the fund and its shareholders or the family of funds; (4) any “fall-out” benefits that accrue to the adviser because of its relationship with the fund, including research services received from brokers that execute fund trades and any fees paid to affiliates of an adviser for services rendered to a fund; (5) comparative fee and expense structures, including a comparison of management fees paid to the adviser with those paid by similar funds both internally and externally as well as management fees charged to institutional and other advisory clients of the adviser for what might be viewed as like services); and (6) the extent of care, conscientiousness and independence with which the fund’s board members perform their duties and their expertise, including whether they are fully informed about all facts the board deems relevant to its consideration of the adviser’s services and fees. The Board noted that the Securities and Exchange

Commission (“SEC”) disclosure requirements regarding the basis for a fund board’s approval of the fund’s investment advisory contract generally align with the factors listed above. The Board was guided by these factors in its review of the proposed Contract to the extent it considered them to be appropriate and relevant, as discussed further below. The Board recognized that certain of the factors listed above (relating to such matters as anticipated Fund performance and any indirect benefits that may accrue to Federated Hermes as a result of the Adviser’s proposed relationship with the Fund) are essentially impossible to apply before the Fund has experienced any meaningful operating history. The Board considered and weighed these factors in light of its substantial accumulated experience in governing the Federated Hermes Funds and working with Federated Hermes on matters relating to the oversight of the Federated Hermes Funds.

In determining to approve the Contract, the members of the Board reviewed and evaluated information and factors they believed to be relevant and appropriate through the exercise of their reasonable business judgment. While individual members of the Board may have weighed certain factors differently, the Board’s determination to approve the Contract was based on a comprehensive consideration of all information provided to the Board. The Board recognized that its evaluation process is evolutionary and that the factors considered and emphasis placed on relevant factors may change in recognition of changing circumstances in the registered fund marketplace. The Independent Trustees were assisted throughout the evaluation process by independent legal counsel. In connection with their deliberations at the August Meetings, the Independent Trustees met separately in executive session with their independent legal counsel and without management present to review the relevant materials and consider their responsibilities under applicable laws. In addition, senior management representatives of Federated Hermes also met with the Independent Trustees and their independent legal counsel to discuss the materials and presentations furnished to the Board at the August Meetings.

#### **Nature, Extent and Quality of Services**

The Board considered the nature, extent and quality of the services to be provided to the Fund by the Adviser and the resources of Federated Hermes to be dedicated to the Fund. In this regard, the Board evaluated, among other things, the proposed terms of the Contract and the range of services to be provided to the Fund by Federated Hermes. The Board considered the Adviser’s personnel, investment philosophy and process, investment research capabilities and resources, trade operations capabilities, experience and performance track record. The Board reviewed the qualifications, backgrounds and responsibilities of the portfolio management team that will be primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the Fund and Federated Hermes’ ability and experience in attracting and retaining qualified personnel to service the proposed Fund. In particular, the Board considered the abilities and experience of the portfolio managers in analyzing factors such as special considerations relevant to investments in U.S. dividend-paying securities. The Board also evaluated the Adviser’s anticipated ability to deliver competitive investment performance for the Fund when compared to the Fund’s Peer Group (as defined below), which was deemed by the Board to be a useful indicator of the Adviser’s anticipated ability to execute the Fund’s investment program.

In addition, the Board considered the financial resources and overall reputation of Federated Hermes and its willingness to consider and make investments in personnel, infrastructure, technology, cybersecurity, business continuity planning and operational enhancements that are designed to benefit the Federated Hermes Funds. The Board also considered its past experience with the Adviser with respect to the services it provides to other Federated Hermes Funds. The Board considered that, although the Fund would be the among the first exchange-traded funds (“ETFs”) managed by the Adviser and its affiliates, the Adviser had extensive experience advising actively managed mutual funds, including mutual funds with similar strategies to those of the Fund. The Board noted the significant acquisition of Hermes Fund Managers Limited (re-designated as Federated Hermes Limited) by Federated Hermes, which has deepened the organization’s investment management expertise and capabilities and expanded the investment process for all of the Federated Hermes Funds to have access to analytical resources related to environmental, social and governance (“ESG”) factors and issuer engagement on ESG matters.

The Board considered the special attributes of the Fund as an ETF relative to a traditional mutual fund and the benefits that are expected to be realized from an investment in the Fund, rather than a traditional mutual fund. The Board also considered the resources devoted by Federated Hermes in developing and maintaining an infrastructure necessary to support the on-going operations of the Fund.

The Board considered the quality of Federated Hermes’ communications with the Board and responsiveness to Board inquiries and requests made from time to time with respect to the Federated Hermes Funds. The Board also considered that Federated Hermes is responsible for providing the Federated Hermes Funds’ officers.

The Board received and evaluated information regarding Federated Hermes’ regulatory and compliance environment. The Board considered Federated Hermes’ compliance program and compliance history and reports from the CCO about Federated Hermes’ compliance with applicable laws and regulations, including responses to regulatory developments and any compliance or other issues raised by regulatory agencies. The Board also noted Federated Hermes’ support of the Federated Hermes Funds’ compliance control structure and the compliance-related resources that would be devoted by the Federated Hermes in support of the Fund’s obligations pursuant to Rule 38a-1 under the 1940 Act, including Federated

Hermes' commitment to respond to rulemaking and other regulatory initiatives of the SEC. The Board considered Federated Hermes' approach to internal audits and risk management with respect to the Federated Hermes Funds and its day-to-day oversight of the Federated Hermes Funds' compliance with their investment objectives and policies as well as with applicable laws and regulations, noting that regulatory and other developments had over time led to an increase in the scope of Federated Hermes' oversight in this regard, including in connection with the designation of the Federated Hermes Funds' investment advisers as the administrators of the Federated Hermes Funds' liquidity risk management program.

The Board also considered the implementation of Federated Hermes' business continuity plans and recognized steps taken by Federated Hermes to continue to provide the same nature, extent and quality of services to the Federated Hermes Funds during the pandemic. In addition, the Board noted Federated Hermes' commitment to maintaining high quality systems and expending substantial resources to prepare for and respond to ongoing changes due to the market, regulatory and control environments in which the Fund and its service providers would operate, including changes associated with the pandemic.

The Board considered Federated Hermes' efforts to provide shareholders in the Federated Hermes Funds with a comprehensive array of funds with different investment objectives, policies and strategies. The Board considered the expenses that Federated Hermes had incurred, as well as the entrepreneurial and other risks assumed by Federated Hermes, in sponsoring and providing on-going services to new funds to expand these opportunities for shareholders. The Board noted the benefits to shareholders of being part of the family of Federated Hermes Funds.

Based on these considerations, the Board concluded that it was satisfied with the nature, extent and quality of the services to be provided to the Fund by the Adviser.

#### **Fund Investment Performance**

The Board noted that the Fund is newly formed and has no prior performance history. The Board considered the investment performance of the Adviser and its portfolio management team and their significant history of managing equity and strategic value dividend portfolios, including, for purposes of considering the investment skill and experience of the Fund's proposed portfolio managers, the investment performance of Federated Hermes Strategic Value Dividend Fund and Federated Hermes International Strategic Value Dividend Fund, each of which is also advised by the Adviser and uses investment strategies similar to those proposed for the Fund (with the exception that, unlike the Fund, each invests in international securities) (the "Similar Federated Hermes Funds"). The Board also considered information comparing the Similar Federated Hermes Funds' performance to their respective benchmarks and appropriate groups of peer funds. The Board also received additional information about the broad range of the portfolio management team's investment experience and their investment philosophy and process.

Based on these considerations, the Board concluded that it was satisfied that the Adviser has the capability of providing satisfactory investment performance for the Fund.

#### **Fund Expenses**

The Board considered the proposed management fee and overall proposed expense structure of the Fund and the comparative fee and expense information that had been provided in connection with the August Meetings. In this regard, the Board was presented with, and considered, information regarding the proposed contractual management fee rate, proposed net management fee rate, and anticipated total expense ratio relative to (i) traditional mutual funds with an institutional share class within the category of peer funds selected by Morningstar, Inc., an independent fund ranking organization (the "Peer Group") and (ii) actively managed ETFs within the category of peer funds selected by Morningstar, Inc.. The Board noted the CCO's view that comparisons to fund peer groups may be helpful, though not conclusive, in evaluating the reasonableness of the Fund's fees. The Board considered, in evaluating such comparisons, that in some cases there may be differences in the funds' objectives or investment management techniques, or the costs to implement the funds, even within the same Peer Group. The Board noted information about structural, operational and other differences between ETFs and traditional mutual funds, including differences in the marketplace in which each type of product must compete. The Board also noted that most of the funds in the Fund's Peer Group do not charge a unitary fee from which operational expenses are paid.

While mindful that courts have cautioned against giving too much weight to comparative information concerning fees charged by other advisers for managing funds with comparable investment programs, the Board noted that it found the use of such comparisons to be relevant to its evaluation. The Board focused on comparisons with other similar registered funds more heavily than non-registered fund products or services because such comparisons are believed to be more relevant. The Board considered that other registered funds are the products most like the Fund, in that they are readily available to Fund shareholders as alternative investment vehicles, and they are the type of investment vehicle, in fact, anticipated to be

chosen and maintained by the Fund's anticipated shareholders. The Board noted that the range of such other registered funds' fees and expenses, therefore, appears to be a relevant indicator of what investors have found to be reasonable in the marketplace in which the Fund will compete. The Board also considered competition in the general ETF marketplace and the impact of market pressures on the price levels for actively managed ETFs such as the Fund.

The Board reviewed the proposed contractual management fee rate, proposed net management fee rate and anticipated total expense ratio of the Fund and noted the position of the Fund's proposed fee rates relative to its Peer Group. In this regard, the Board noted that the proposed contractual management fee rate of the Fund was below the median of the Peer Group.

The Board noted the Fund's "unitary" fee structure, under which the Adviser would, in addition to providing investment management services, arrange for transfer agency, custody, fund administration and accounting, and other non-distribution related services necessary for the Fund to operate. The Board considered that, other than the management fee, the Adviser would pay all operating expenses of the Fund, except for: (i) interest and taxes (including, but not limited to, income, excise, transaction, transfer and withholding taxes); (ii) expenses of the Fund incurred with respect to the acquisition and disposition of portfolio securities and the execution of portfolio transactions, including brokerage commissions and short sale dividend or interest expense; (iii) expenses incurred in connection with any distribution plan adopted by the Trust in compliance with Rule 12b-1 under the 1940 Act, including distribution fees; (iv) acquired fund fees and expenses; (v) litigation expenses; (vi) proxy-related expenses; (vii) tax reclaim recovery expenses; and (viii) any expenses determined to be extraordinary expenses.

The Board received and considered information about fees charged by Federated Hermes to the similar Federated Hermes Funds. The Board reviewed information about structural, operational and other differences between the similar Federated Hermes Funds and the Fund. The Board also received and considered information about the fees charged by Federated Hermes for providing advisory services to other types of clients with investment strategies similar to those proposed for the Fund, including non-registered fund clients (including an institutional separate account and a foreign fund) and a third-party unaffiliated registered fund for which the Adviser or an affiliate serves as sub-adviser. The Board noted the CCO's conclusion that non-registered fund clients are inherently different products due to the following differences, among others: (i) different types of targeted investors; (ii) different applicable laws and regulations; (iii) different legal structures; (iv) different average account sizes and portfolio management techniques made necessary by different cash flows and different associated costs; (v) the time spent by portfolio managers and their teams (among other personnel across various departments, including legal, compliance and risk management) in reviewing securities pricing and fund liquidity; (vi) different administrative responsibilities; (vii) different degrees of risk associated with management; and (viii) a variety of different costs. The Board also considered information regarding the differences in the nature of the services required for Federated Hermes to manage its proprietary registered fund business versus managing a discrete pool of assets as a sub-adviser to another institution's registered fund, noting the CCO's view that Federated Hermes generally performs significant additional services and assumes substantially greater risks in managing a Federated Hermes Fund, such as the Fund, than in its role as sub-adviser to an unaffiliated third-party registered fund. The Board noted that the CCO did not consider the fees for providing advisory services to other types of clients to be determinative in judging the appropriateness of the Fund's management fee.

Based on these considerations, the Board concluded that the proposed fees and anticipated total expense ratio of the Fund, in conjunction with other matters considered, are reasonable in light of the services to be provided.

### **Profitability**

The Board received and considered profitability information furnished by Federated Hermes, as requested by the CCO, that reported projected revenues for the Fund, as detailed cost allocation reports had not yet been projected for the Fund. The Board considered the CCO's view that, while these cost allocation reports apply consistent allocation processes, the inherent difficulties in allocating costs on a fund-by-fund basis continue to cause the CCO to question the precision of the process and to conclude that such reports may be unreliable because a single change in an allocation estimate may dramatically alter the resulting estimate of cost and/or profitability of a Federated Hermes Fund and may produce unintended consequences. The Board considered that the Fund was new to Federated Hermes and noted the CCO's view that any projected cost allocation and/or profit margin does not represent the full or actual cost of operating a Federated Hermes Fund and makes only rough estimates of the cost to launch a Federated Hermes Fund. The Board also considered the CCO's view that, while the Fund is expected to grow in size, the creation and maintenance of the Fund requires a substantial initial investment. The allocation information, including the CCO's view that estimations regarding the Fund may be unreliable, was considered in the evaluation by the Board.

The Board also reviewed information compiled by Federated Hermes comparing its profitability information to other publicly held fund management companies, including information regarding profitability trends over time. The Board considered that the CCO noted that Federated Hermes regularly undertakes to establish new Federated Hermes Funds and maintains a number of other smaller Federated Hermes Funds that, while expected to grow to a greater size, nevertheless require substantial investment and waiver or assumption of fees and other expenses in order to deliver them to the marketplace.

The Board considered the CCO's conclusion that, based on such profitability information, Federated Hermes' profit margins did not appear to be excessive. The Board also considered the CCO's view that Federated Hermes appeared financially sound, with the resources necessary to fulfill its obligations under its contracts with the Federated Hermes Funds, including the proposed Contract.

#### **Economies of Scale**

The Board received and considered information about the notion of possible realization of "economies of scale" as a fund grows larger, the difficulties of calculating economies of scale at an individual fund level, and the extent to which potential scale benefits are shared with shareholders. The Board considered that any reduction in fixed costs associated with the management of the Fund would benefit the Adviser due to the unitary fee structure of the Fund, but that the unitary fee would protect shareholders from a rise in operating costs and/or a decline in Fund assets and is a transparent means of informing the Fund's shareholders of the fees associated with the Fund. The Board also considered that Federated Hermes has made significant and long-term investments in areas that support all of the Federated Hermes Funds, such as: personnel, processes and tools for portfolio management, including the use of market data on which portfolio managers make investment decisions); trading operations; ESG integration and issuer engagement on ESG matters; shareholder services; compliance; business continuity; cybersecurity; internal audit and risk management functions; and technology that supports the provision of investment management services. The Board noted that Federated Hermes' investments in these areas are extensive and are designed to provide enhanced services to the Federated Hermes Funds and their shareholders. The Board considered that the benefits of these investments are likely to be shared with the family of Federated Hermes Funds as a whole. In addition, the Board considered that fee waivers and expense reimbursements are another means for potential economies of scale to be shared with shareholders and can provide protection from an increase in expenses if a Federated Hermes Fund's assets decline. The Board noted the fee waiver arrangement proposed for the Fund. The Board considered that, in order for the Federated Hermes Funds to remain competitive in the marketplace, Federated Hermes has frequently waived fees and/or reimbursed expenses and has disclosed to shareholders and/or reported to the Board its intention to do so (or continue to do so) in the future.

The Board also considered reports on adviser-paid fees (commonly referred to as "revenue sharing") that were provided to the Board throughout the year. The Board considered that Federated Hermes and the CCO believe that this information should be viewed to determine if there was an incentive to either not apply breakpoints, or to apply breakpoints at higher levels, and should not be viewed to evaluate the reasonableness of management fees. The Board also noted the absence of any applicable regulatory or industry guidelines on this subject, which is compounded by the lack of any uniform methodology or pattern with respect to structuring fund management fees with breakpoints that serve to reduce the fees as a fund attains a certain size. The Board considered that the CCO did not recommend institution of breakpoints in pricing Federated Hermes' proposed investment management services to the Fund at this time. The Board noted that, as part of its future annual review of the Contract, it will review asset growth in the Fund, whether economies of scale that can be reasonably identified have been achieved, and the extent to which such economies of scale may be shared with Fund shareholders.

#### **Other Benefits**

The Board considered other benefits to the Adviser and its affiliates from their proposed relationships with the Fund. In connection with the Board's governance of the Federated Hermes Funds, the Board considered information regarding the compensation and other ancillary (or "fall-out") benefits that Federated Hermes derived from its relationships with the Federated Hermes Funds. The Board noted that, in addition to receiving advisory fees under the Federated Hermes Funds' investment advisory contracts, Federated Hermes' affiliates also receive fees for providing other services to the Federated Hermes Funds under separate contracts (e.g., for serving as the Federated Hermes Funds' administrator and distributor). In this regard, the Board considered that certain of Federated Hermes' affiliates provide distribution and shareholder services to the Federated Hermes Funds, for which they may be compensated through distribution and servicing fees paid pursuant to Rule 12b-1 plans or otherwise. The Board also received and considered information detailing any indirect benefit that Federated Hermes may derive from its receipt of research services from brokers who execute portfolio trades for the Federated Hermes Funds.

### **Conclusions**

The Board considered: (i) the CCO's conclusion that his observations and the information accompanying the New Fund CCO Fee Evaluation Report show that the proposed management fee for the Fund is reasonable; and (ii) the CCO's recommendation that the Board approve the proposed management fee.

On the basis of the information and factors summarized above, among other information and factors deemed relevant by the Board, and the evaluation thereof, the Board, including the Independent Trustees, unanimously voted to approve the initial advisory contract and its two year term in August of 2022. The Board based its determination to approve the Contract on the totality of the circumstances and relevant factors and with a view of past and future long-term considerations. Not all of the factors and considerations identified above were necessarily deemed to be relevant to the Fund, nor did the Board consider any one of them to be determinative. With respect to the factors that were deemed to be relevant, the Board's determination to approve the Contract reflects its view that Federated Hermes' proposal to establish and manage the Fund and its past performance and actions in providing services to other Federated Hermes Funds (which the Board has found to be satisfactory with respect to such other Federated Hermes Funds) provided a satisfactory basis to support the determination to approve the proposed arrangement.