

**Item 1: Cover Page  
Part 2A of Form ADV: Firm Brochure  
February 2024**



**STRONGBOX  
WEALTH**

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Chief Compliance Officer**

This brochure provides information about the qualifications and business practices of StrongBox Wealth, LLC ("StrongBox Wealth"). If clients have any questions about the contents of this brochure, please contact us at [chuck@strongboxwealth.com](mailto:chuck@strongboxwealth.com). The information in this brochure has not been approved or verified by the United States Securities and Exchange Commission or by any State Securities Authority. Additional information about our firm is also available on the SEC's website at [www.adviserinfo.sec.gov](http://www.adviserinfo.sec.gov) by searching CRD #304952.

Please note that the use of the term "registered investment adviser" and description of our firm and/or our associates as "registered" does not imply a certain level of skill or training. Clients are encouraged to review this Brochure and Brochure Supplements for our firm's associates who advise clients for more information on the qualifications of our firm and our employees.

## Item 2: Material Changes

StrongBox Wealth is required to make clients aware of information that has changed since the last annual update to the Firm Brochure ("Brochure") and that may be important to them. Clients can then determine whether to review the brochure in its entirety or to contact us with questions about the changes.

Since our last annual amendment filed on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, we have the following material change(s) to disclose:

- Our firm has entered into an arrangement with SmartAsset, which is a lead generation platform for financial advisors. As a result, we have amended Item 14 to disclose that we provide compensation to unaffiliated persons for client referrals. Please see Item 14 for additional information.
- For assets held at a custodian that is not directly accessible by our firm, we may, but are not required to, manage these held away accounts using the Pontera Order Management System ("Pontera"). Pontera allows our firm to view and manage such assets. Clients will give our firm written authorization to deduct the fee from another non-qualified account managed by our firm. If there are insufficient funds available in another client account or our firm believes that deducting the advisory fee from another client account would be prohibited by applicable law, we will invoice the client directly. Fees will be based upon the client's negotiated fee in accordance with our portfolio management fee schedule and the client's advisory agreement. Clients will not pay an additional fee for Pontera. Based on the held away managed account's value, our firm pays 25 basis points from our advisory fee to Pontera on a quarterly basis. Please see Item 5 for additional information.
- Our firm has begun offering Retirement Plan Consulting clients access to our firm's model portfolios or managed account program through a Third-Party Investment Monitoring & Model Portfolio Management Platform ("TPIMMPMP") for the use of their Plan Participants. For Plan Sponsors accessing our firm's model portfolios or a managed account program through a TPIMMPMP, the TPIMMPMP charges an annualized fee of up to 0.20% of Plan assets. In addition to the TPIMMPMP expense, some recordkeepers assess an additional annualized fee of up to 0.15% of Plan assets for their services associated with offering TPIMMPMPs. The specific billing arrangement and the fee to be charged by the TPIMMPMP and recordkeeper will be disclosed in a separate agreement with the TPIMMPMP and recordkeeper and is subject to change. In addition, our firm may assess a fee of up to 1.00% of Plan assets for ongoing investment management, as indicated in the signed 3(38) ERISA agreement. Please see Item 4: "Advisory Business" and Item 5: "Fees & Compensation" for additional information.

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## Item 4: Advisory Business

Our firm is dedicated to providing individuals and other types of clients with a wide array of investment advisory services. Our firm is a limited liability company formed under the laws of the State of Delaware in 2019 and has been in business as an investment adviser since that time. Our firm is wholly owned by Charles S. Cooper III, and Jonathan G. Garlow.

The purpose of this Brochure is to disclose the conflicts of interest associated with the investment transactions, compensation and any other matters related to investment decisions made by our firm or its representatives. As a fiduciary, it is our duty to always act in the client's best interest. This is accomplished in part by knowing our client. Our firm has established a service-oriented advisory practice with open lines of communication for many different types of clients to help meet their financial goals while remaining sensitive to risk tolerance and time horizons. Working with clients to understand their investment objectives while educating them about our process, facilitates the kind of working relationship we value.

### **Types of Advisory Services Offered**

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#### **Investment Management:**

As part of our Investment Management service, a portfolio is created, consisting of individual stocks, bonds, exchange traded funds ("ETFs"), options, mutual funds and other public and private securities or investments. The client's individual investment strategy is tailored to their specific needs and may include some or all of the previously mentioned securities. Once the appropriate investment strategy has been determined, your accounts are continuously and regularly monitored. If necessary, adjustments or rebalances will be made based on our judgment of risks and opportunities within market conditions, with the goal of keeping your accounts allocated in accordance with your individual needs, risk tolerance, stated goals and objectives.

#### **Comprehensive Wealth Management:**

As part of our Comprehensive Wealth Management service, clients will be provided asset management and financial planning or consulting services. This service is designed to assist clients in meeting their financial goals through the use of a financial plan or consultation. Our firm conducts client meetings to understand their current financial situation, existing resources, financial goals, and tolerance for risk. Based on what is learned, an investment approach is presented to the client, consisting of individual stocks, bonds, ETFs, options, mutual funds and other public and private securities or investments. Once the appropriate investment strategy has been determined, your accounts are continuously and regularly monitored. If necessary, adjustments or rebalances will be made based on our judgment of risks and opportunities within market conditions, with the goal of keeping your accounts allocated in accordance with your individual needs, risk tolerance, stated goals and objectives. Upon client request, our firm provides a summary of observations and recommendations for the planning or consulting aspects of this service.

## **Financial Planning & Consulting:**

Our firm provides a variety of standalone financial planning and consulting services to clients for the management of financial resources based upon an analysis of current situation, goals, and objectives. Financial planning services will typically involve preparing a financial plan or rendering a financial consultation for clients based on the client's financial goals and objectives. This planning or consulting may encompass Investment Planning, Retirement Planning, Estate Planning, Charitable Planning, Education Planning, Corporate and Personal Tax Planning, Cost Segregation Study, Corporate Structure, Real Estate Analysis, Mortgage/Debt Analysis, Insurance Analysis, Lines of Credit Evaluation, or Business and Personal Financial Planning.

Written financial plans or financial consultations rendered to clients usually include general recommendations for a course of activity or specific actions to be taken by the clients. Implementation of the recommendations will be at the discretion of the client. Our firm provides clients with a summary of their financial situation, and observations for financial planning engagements. Financial consultations are not typically accompanied by a written summary of observations and recommendations, as the process is less formal than the planning service. Assuming that all the information and documents requested from the client are provided promptly, plans or consultations are typically completed within 6 months of the client signing a contract with our firm.

## **Retirement Plan Consulting:**

Our firm provides retirement plan consulting services to employer plan sponsors on an ongoing basis. Generally, such consulting services consist of assisting employer plan sponsors in establishing, monitoring and reviewing their company's participant-directed retirement plan. As the needs of the Plan Sponsor dictate, areas of advising may include:

- Establishing an Investment Policy Statement – Our firm will assist in the development of a statement that summarizes the investment goals and objectives along with the broad strategies to be employed to meet the objectives.
- Investment Options – Our firm will work with the Plan Sponsor to evaluate existing investment options and make recommendations for appropriate changes.
- Asset Allocation and Portfolio Construction – Our firm will develop strategic asset allocation models to aid Participants in developing strategies to meet their investment objectives, time horizon, financial situation and tolerance for risk.
- Investment Monitoring – Our firm will monitor the performance of the investments and notify the client in the event of over/underperformance and in times of market volatility.
- Participant Education – Our firm will provide opportunities to educate plan participants about their retirement plan offerings, different investment options, and general guidance on allocation strategies.

In providing services for retirement plan consulting, our firm does not provide any advisory services with respect to the following types of assets: employer securities, real estate (excluding real estate funds and publicly traded REITS), participant loans, non-publicly traded securities or assets, other illiquid investments, or brokerage window programs (collectively, "Excluded Assets"). All retirement plan consulting services shall be in compliance with the applicable state laws regulating retirement consulting services. This applies to client accounts that are retirement or other employee benefit plans ("Plan") governed by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, as amended ("ERISA"). If the client accounts are part of a Plan, and our firm accepts appointment to provide services to such accounts, our firm acknowledges its fiduciary standard within the meaning of Section

3(21) or 3(38) of ERISA as designated by the Retirement Plan Consulting Agreement with respect to the provision of services described therein.

### **Dynasty Financial Partners, LLC**

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StrongBox Wealth has entered into a contractual relationship with Dynasty Financial Partners, LLC ("Dynasty"), which provides StrongBox Wealth with operational and back office support including access to a network of service providers. Through the Dynasty network of service providers, StrongBox Wealth may receive preferred pricing on trading technology, reporting, custody, brokerage, compliance and other related services. Dynasty charges a "Platform Fee," for which, unless otherwise disclosed, the client will be charged, separate from and in addition to such client's annual investment management fee, as described in Item 5 below. In addition, Dynasty's subsidiary, Dynasty Wealth Management, LLC ("DWM") is an SEC registered investment adviser, that provides access to a range of investment services including: separately managed accounts ("SMA"), mutual fund and ETF asset allocation strategies, and unified managed accounts ("UMA") managed by external third party managers (collectively, the "Investment Programs"). StrongBox Wealth and its clients may separately engage the services of Dynasty and/or its subsidiaries to access the Investment Programs. Under the SMA and UMA programs, StrongBox Wealth will maintain the ability to select the specific, underlying third party managers that will, in turn, have day-to-day discretionary trading authority over the requisite client assets.

DWM sponsors an investment management platform (the "Platform" or the "TAMP") that is available to the advisers in the Dynasty Network, such as StrongBox Wealth. Through the Platform, DWM and Dynasty collectively provide certain technology, administrative, operations and advisory support services that allow advisers to manage their own portfolios and access independent third-party managers that provide discretionary services in the form of traditional managed accounts and investment models. Advisers can allocate all or a portion of client assets among the different independent third-party managers via the Platform. Advisers may also use the model management feature of the TAMP by creating their own asset allocation model and underlying investments that comprise the model. Through the model management feature, advisers may be able to outsource the implementation of trade orders and periodic rebalancing of the model when needed.

StrongBox Wealth will maintain the direct contractual relationship with each client and obtain, through such agreements, the authority to engage independent third-party managers, DWM and/or Dynasty, as applicable, for services rendered through the Platform in service of such client. StrongBox Wealth may delegate discretionary trading authority to DWM and/or independent third-party managers to effect investment and reinvestment of client assets with the ability to buy, sell or otherwise effect investment transactions and allocate client assets. If a client is participating in certain Investment Programs, DWM or the designated manager, as applicable, is also authorized without prior consultation of StrongBox Wealth or the client to buy, sell, trade or allocate such client's assets in accordance with the client's designated portfolio and to deliver instructions to the designated broker-dealer and/or custodian of such client's assets.

### **Tailoring of Advisory Services**

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Our firm offers individualized investment advice, models, and customized portfolio management to our Investment Management and Comprehensive Wealth Management clients. General investment advice will be offered to our Financial Planning & Consulting, and Retirement Plan Consulting clients.

Each Investment Management and Comprehensive Wealth Management client has the opportunity to place reasonable restrictions on the types of investments to be held in the portfolio. Restrictions on investments in certain securities or types of securities may not be possible due to the level of difficulty this would entail in managing the account.

### **Participation in Wrap Fee Programs**

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Our firm does not offer or sponsor a wrap fee program.

### **Regulatory Assets Under Management**

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Our firm managed \$374,134,645 on a discretionary basis and \$19,905,655 on a non-discretionary basis for a total of \$394,040,301 in assets under management as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

## **Item 5: Fees & Compensation**

### **Compensation for Our Advisory Services**

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#### **Investment Management:**

The maximum annual fee charged for this service will not exceed 1.25%. Fees to be assessed will be outlined in the advisory agreement signed by the client. Annualized fees are typically billed on a pro-rata basis quarterly in advance based on the value of the account(s) on the last business day of the previous quarter. When billing in advance, adjustments are made for deposits and withdrawals in excess of \$50,000 during the quarter. In certain cases, annualized fees are billed quarterly in arrears based on the average daily balance of the account(s) for the previous quarter. The specific billing arrangement is determined by the applicable custodian. Our firm bills on cash unless indicated otherwise in writing. In rare cases, our firm will agree to directly invoice. Fees are negotiable and will be deducted from client account(s). As part of this fee deduction process, clients understand the following:

- a) The client's independent custodian sends statements at least quarterly showing the market values for each security included in the Assets and all account disbursements, including the amount of the advisory fees paid to our firm;
- b) Clients will provide authorization permitting our firm to be directly paid by these terms. Our firm will send an invoice directly to the custodian; and
- c) If our firm sends a copy of our invoice to the client, our invoice will include a disclosure urging the client to compare the information provided in our statement with those from the qualified custodian.

For assets held at a custodian that is not directly accessible by our firm, we may, but are not required to, manage these held away accounts using the Pontera Order Management System ("Pontera"). Pontera allows our firm to view and manage such assets. Our advisory fees will not be deducted directly from the held away accounts managed through Pontera. Clients will give our firm written authorization to deduct the fee from another non-qualified account managed by our firm. If there are insufficient funds available in another client account or our firm believes that deducting the advisory fee from another client account would be prohibited by applicable law, we will invoice the client directly. Fees will be based upon the client's negotiated fee in accordance with our portfolio



management fee schedule and the client's advisory agreement. The client does not pay an additional fee for Pontera. Based on the held away managed account's value, our firm pays 25 basis points from our advisory fee to Pontera on a quarterly basis.

### **Comprehensive Wealth Management:**

The maximum annual fee charged for this service will not exceed 1.50%. Fees to be assessed will be outlined in the advisory agreement signed by the client. Annualized fees are typically billed on a pro-rata basis quarterly in advance based on the value of the account(s) on the last business day of the previous quarter. When billing in advance, adjustments are made for deposits and withdrawals in excess of \$50,000 during the quarter. In certain cases, annualized fees are billed quarterly in arrears based on the average daily balance of the account(s) for the previous quarter. The specific billing arrangement is determined by the applicable custodian. Our firm bills on cash unless indicated otherwise in writing. In rare cases, our firm will agree to directly invoice. Fees are negotiable and will be deducted from client account(s). As part of this fee deduction process, clients understand the following:

- a) The client's independent custodian sends statements at least quarterly showing the market values for each security included in the account and all account disbursements, including the amount of the advisory fees paid to our firm;
- b) Clients will provide authorization permitting our firm to be directly paid by these terms. Our firm will send an invoice directly to the custodian; and
- c) If our firm sends a copy of our invoice to the client, our invoice will include a disclosure urging the client to compare the information provided in our statement with those from the qualified custodian.

For assets held at a custodian that is not directly accessible by our firm, we may, but are not required to, manage these held away accounts using the Pontera Order Management System ("Pontera"). Pontera allows our firm to view and manage such assets. Our advisory fees will not be deducted directly from the held away accounts managed through Pontera. Clients will give our firm written authorization to deduct the fee from another non-qualified account managed by our firm. If there are insufficient funds available in another client account or our firm believes that deducting the advisory fee from another client account would be prohibited by applicable law, we will invoice the client directly. Fees will be based upon the client's negotiated fee in accordance with our portfolio management fee schedule and the client's advisory agreement. The client does not pay an additional fee for Pontera. Based on the held away managed account's value, our firm pays 25 basis points from our advisory fee to Pontera on a quarterly basis. .

### **Financial Planning & Consulting:**

Our firm charges on an hourly or flat fee basis for financial planning and consulting services. The total estimated fee, as well as the ultimate fee charged, is based on the scope and complexity of our engagement with the client. The maximum hourly fee to be charged will not exceed \$500. Flat fees will not exceed \$25,000. The fee-paying arrangements will be determined on a case-by-case basis and will be detailed in the signed consulting agreement. Our firm will not require a retainer exceeding \$1,200 when services cannot be rendered within 6 months.



## **Retirement Plan Consulting:**

The total estimated fee and ultimate fee charged for Retirement Plan Consulting services is based on the scope and complexity of our engagement with the client. If applicable, the initial flat fee for assisting in the formation and the establishment of a Plan or transition of the Plan shall not exceed \$10,000 and will be directly invoiced to the Plan Sponsor. Ongoing investment management /consultation services for Retirement Plan Consulting clients are billed based on the percentage of Plan assets under management, on a flat fee basis, or on an hourly fee basis. Fees based on a percentage of managed Plan assets will not exceed 1.00%. Our flat fees for advisory services range from \$750 to \$10,000. Flat fees for Plan Participant education services will not exceed \$120 per Plan Participant per year. The maximum hourly fee to be charged will not exceed \$250. The fee-paying arrangements will be determined on a case-by-case basis and will be detailed in the signed consulting agreement.

Our firm provides Plan Sponsors with access to our firm's model portfolios or managed account program through a Third-Party Investment Monitoring & Model Portfolio Management Platform ("TPIMMPMP") for the use of their Plan Participants. For Plan Sponsors accessing our firm's model portfolios or a managed account program through a TPIMMPMP, the TPIMMPMP charges an annualized fee of up to 0.20% of Plan assets. In addition to the TPIMMPMP expense, some recordkeepers assess an additional annualized fee of up to 0.15% of Plan assets for their services associated with offering TPIMMPMPs. The specific billing arrangement and the fee to be charged by the TPIMMPMP and recordkeeper will be disclosed in a separate agreement with the TPIMMPMP and recordkeeper and is subject to change. In addition, our firm may assess a fee of up to 1.00% of Plan assets as indicated in the signed 3(38) ERISA agreement. If our firm's model portfolios are selected in the TPIMMPMP for Plan Participants, the arrangement will result in Plan Participants paying an additional fee to our firm.

## **Other Types of Fees & Expenses**

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As discussed above, StrongBox Wealth uses Dynasty's TAMP services. TAMP related charges are not included in the investment management fee you pay to StrongBox Wealth. You will be charged, separate from and in addition to your investment management fee, any applicable Platform Fees as well as applicable independent manager fees. StrongBox Wealth does not receive any portion of the fees paid directly to Dynasty or the service providers made available through its platform, including the independent managers.

Each of the Platform Fee and independent manager fees are determined by the particular program(s) and manager(s) with which your assets are invested, and are calculated based upon a percentage of your assets under management, as applicable. The Platform Fee generally ranges from 0 - .25% annually, independent fixed income manager fees generally range from 0 - .35% annually, and independent equity manager fees generally range from 0 - .80% annually.

You will note the total fee reflected on your custodial statement will represent the sum of StrongBox Wealth's investment management fee, Platform Fee(s) and independent manager fee(s), accordingly. You should review such statements to determine the total amount of fees associated with your requisite investments, and you should review your investment management agreement with StrongBox Wealth to determine the investment management fee you pay to us.

Clients will also incur transaction fees for trades executed by their chosen custodian, via individual transaction charges. These transaction fees are separate from our firm's advisory fees and will be

disclosed by the chosen custodian. Schwab does not charge transaction fees for U.S. listed equities and exchange traded funds. Clients may also pay holdings charges imposed by the chosen custodian for certain investments, internal operating expenses imposed directly by a mutual fund, index fund, or exchange traded fund, which shall be disclosed in the fund's prospectus (i.e., fund management fees and other fund expenses), initial or deferred sales charges, mutual fund sales loads, 12b-1 fees, surrender charges, variable annuity fees, IRA and qualified retirement plan fees, mark-ups and mark-downs, spreads paid to market makers, fees for trades executed away from custodian, wire transfer fees and other fees and taxes on brokerage accounts and securities transactions. Our firm does not receive a portion of these fees.

### **Termination & Refunds**

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Either party may terminate the advisory agreement signed with our firm for Investment Management and/or Comprehensive Wealth Management services by providing written notice to the other party at any time. Upon notice of termination, our firm will process a pro-rata refund of the unearned portion of the advisory fees billed in advance or charge pro-rata advisory fees for services rendered to the point of termination for accounts billed in arrears. If advisory fees cannot be deducted, our firm will send an invoice for due advisory fees to the client.

Financial Planning & Consulting clients may terminate their agreement at any time before the delivery of a financial plan by providing written notice to the other party. For the purpose of calculating refunds, all work performed by us up to the point of termination shall be calculated at the hourly fee currently in effect. Clients will receive a pro-rata refund of unearned fees based on the time and effort expended by our firm.

Either party to a Retirement Plan Consulting Agreement may terminate at any time by providing at least 30 days written notice to the other party. Billing will terminate 30 days after receipt of termination notice. Clients will be charged on a pro-rata basis, which takes into account work completed by our firm on behalf of the client. Clients will incur charges for bona fide advisory services rendered up to the point of termination (determined as 30 days from receipt of said written notice) and such fees will be due and payable.

### **Commissionable Securities Sales**

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Our firm and representatives do not sell securities for a commission in advisory accounts.

## **Item 6: Performance-Based Fees & Side-By-Side Management**

Our firm does not charge performance-based fees.

## **Item 7: Types of Clients & Account Requirements**

Our firm has the following types of clients:

- Individuals and High Net Worth Individuals;
- Trusts, Estates or Charitable Organizations;
- Pension and Profit-Sharing Plans;

- Corporations, Limited Liability Companies and/or Other Business Types

Our firm does not impose requirements for opening and maintaining accounts or otherwise engaging us.

## Item 8: Methods of Analysis, Investment Strategies & Risk of Loss

### Methods of Analysis

We use the following methods of analysis in formulating our investment advice and/or managing client assets. The method(s) used will depend, among other things, on each client's unique scenario, objectives, and complexity.

**Charting:** In this type of technical analysis, our firm reviews charts of market and security activity in an attempt to identify when the market is moving up or down and to predict when how long the trend may last and when that trend might reverse.

**Cyclical Analysis:** Statistical analysis of specific events occurring at a sufficient number of relatively predictable intervals that they can be forecasted into the future. Cyclical analysis asserts that cyclical forces drive price movements in the financial markets. Risks include that cycles may invert or disappear and there is no expectation that this type of analysis will pinpoint turning points, instead be used in conjunction with other methods of analysis.

**Duration Constraints:** Our firm adhere to a discipline of generally maintaining duration within a narrow band around benchmark duration in order to limit exposure to market risk. Our portfolio management team rebalances client portfolios to their current duration targets on a periodic basis. The risk of constraining duration is that the client may not participate fully in a large rally in bond prices.

**Fundamental Analysis:** The analysis of a business's financial statements (usually to analyze the business's assets, liabilities, and earnings), health, and its competitors and markets. When analyzing a stock, futures contract, or currency using fundamental analysis there are two basic approaches one can use: bottom up analysis and top down analysis. The terms are used to distinguish such analysis from other types of investment analysis, such as quantitative and technical. Fundamental analysis is performed on historical and present data, but with the goal of making financial forecasts. There are several possible objectives: (a) to conduct a company stock valuation and predict its probable price evolution; (b) to make a projection on its business performance; (c) to evaluate its management and make internal business decisions; (d) and/or to calculate its credit risk; and (e) to find out the intrinsic value of the share.

When the objective of the analysis is to determine what stock to buy and at what price, there are two basic methodologies investors rely upon: (a) Fundamental analysis maintains that markets may misprice a security in the short run but that the "correct" price will eventually be reached. Profits can be made by purchasing the mispriced security and then waiting for the market to recognize its "mistake" and reprice the security; and (b) Technical analysis maintains that all information is reflected already in the price of a security. Technical analysts analyze trends and believe that sentiment changes predate and predict trend changes. Investors' emotional responses to price

movements lead to recognizable price chart patterns. Technical analysts also analyze historical trends to predict future price movement. Investors can use one or both of these different but complementary methods for stock picking. This presents a potential risk, as the price of a security can move up or down along with the overall market regardless of the economic and financial factors considered in evaluating the stock.

**Quantitative Analysis:** The use of models, or algorithms, to evaluate assets for investment. The process usually consists of searching vast databases for patterns, such as correlations among liquid assets or price-movement patterns (trend following or mean reversion). The resulting strategies may involve high-frequency trading. The results of the analysis are taken into consideration in the decision to buy or sell securities and in the management of portfolio characteristics. A risk in using quantitative analysis is that the methods or models used may be based on assumptions that prove to be incorrect.

**Qualitative Analysis:** A securities analysis that uses subjective judgment based on unquantifiable information, such as management expertise, industry cycles, strength of research and development, and labor relations. Qualitative analysis contrasts with quantitative analysis, which focuses on numbers that can be found on reports such as balance sheets. The two techniques, however, will often be used together in order to examine a company's operations and evaluate its potential as an investment opportunity. Qualitative analysis deals with intangible, inexact concerns that belong to the social and experiential realm rather than the mathematical one. This approach depends on the kind of intelligence that machines (currently) lack, since things like positive associations with a brand, management trustworthiness, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage and cultural shifts are difficult, arguably impossible, to capture with numerical inputs. A risk in using qualitative analysis is that subjective judgment may prove incorrect.

**Sector Analysis:** Sector analysis involves identification and analysis of various industries or economic sectors that are likely to exhibit superior performance. Academic studies indicate that the health of a stock's sector is as important as the performance of the individual stock itself. In other words, even the best stock located in a weak sector will often perform poorly because that sector is out of favor. Each industry has differences in terms of its customer base, market share among firms, industry growth, competition, regulation and business cycles. Learning how the industry operates provides a deeper understanding of a company's financial health. One method of analyzing a company's growth potential is examining whether the amount of customers in the overall market is expected to grow. In some markets, there is zero or negative growth, a factor demanding careful consideration. Additionally, market analysts recommend that investors should monitor sectors that are nearing the bottom of performance rankings for possible signs of an impending turnaround.

**Technical Analysis:** A security analysis methodology for forecasting the direction of prices through the study of past market data, primarily price and volume. A fundamental principle of technical analysis is that a market's price reflects all relevant information, so their analysis looks at the history of a security's trading pattern rather than external drivers such as economic, fundamental and news events. Therefore, price action tends to repeat itself due to investors collectively tending toward patterned behavior – hence technical analysis focuses on identifiable trends and conditions. Technical analysts also widely use market indicators of many sorts, some of which are mathematical transformations of price, often including up and down volume, advance/decline data and other inputs. These indicators are used to help assess whether an asset is trending, and if it is, the probability of its direction and of continuation. Technicians also look for relationships between price/volume indices and market indicators. Technical analysis employs models and trading rules based on price and volume transformations, such as the relative strength index, moving averages,

regressions, inter-market and intra-market price correlations, business cycles, stock market cycles or, classically, through recognition of chart patterns. Technical analysis is widely used among traders and financial professionals and is very often used by active day traders, market makers and pit traders. The risk associated with this type of analysis is that analysts use subjective judgment to decide which pattern(s) a particular instrument reflects at a given time and what the interpretation of that pattern should be.

## Investment Strategies We Use

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We use the following strategies in managing client accounts, provided that such strategies are appropriate to the needs of the client and consistent with the client's investment objectives, risk tolerance, and time horizons, among other considerations:

**Asset Allocation:** The implementation of an investment strategy that attempts to balance risk versus reward by adjusting the percentage of each asset in an investment portfolio according to the investor's risk tolerance, goals and investment time frame. Asset allocation is based on the principle that different assets perform differently in different market and economic conditions. A fundamental justification for asset allocation is the notion that different asset classes offer returns that are not perfectly correlated, hence diversification reduces the overall risk in terms of the variability of returns for a given level of expected return. Although risk is reduced as long as correlations are not perfect, it is typically forecast (wholly or in part) based on statistical relationships (like correlation and variance) that existed over some past period. Expectations for return are often derived in the same way.

An asset class is a group of economic resources sharing similar characteristics, such as riskiness and return. There are many types of assets that may or may not be included in an asset allocation strategy. The "traditional" asset classes are stocks (value, dividend, growth, or sector-specific [or a "blend" of any two or more of the preceding]; large-cap versus mid-cap, small-cap or micro-cap; domestic, foreign [developed], emerging or frontier markets), bonds (fixed income securities more generally: investment-grade or junk [high-yield]; government or corporate; short-term, intermediate, long-term; domestic, foreign, emerging markets), and cash or cash equivalents. Allocation among these three provides a starting point. Usually included are hybrid instruments such as convertible bonds and preferred stocks, counting as a mixture of bonds and stocks. Other alternative assets that may be considered include: commodities: precious metals, nonferrous metals, agriculture, energy, others.; Commercial or residential real estate (also REITs); Collectibles such as art, coins, or stamps; insurance products (annuity, life settlements, catastrophe bonds, personal life insurance products, etc.); derivatives such as long-short or market neutral strategies, options, collateralized debt, and futures; foreign currency; venture capital; private equity; and/or distressed securities.

There are several types of asset allocation strategies based on investment goals, risk tolerance, time frames and diversification. The most common forms of asset allocation are: strategic, dynamic, tactical, and core-satellite.

**Strategic Asset Allocation:** The primary goal of a strategic asset allocation is to create an asset mix that seeks to provide the optimal balance between expected risk and return for a long-term investment horizon. Generally speaking, strategic asset allocation strategies are agnostic to economic environments, i.e., they do not change their allocation postures relative to changing market or economic conditions.

**Dynamic Asset Allocation:** Dynamic asset allocation is similar to strategic asset allocation in that portfolios are built by allocating to an asset mix that seeks to provide the optimal balance between expected risk and return for a long-term investment horizon. Like strategic allocation strategies, dynamic strategies largely retain exposure to their original asset classes; however, unlike strategic strategies, dynamic asset allocation portfolios will adjust their postures over time relative to changes in the economic environment.

**Tactical Asset Allocation:** Tactical asset allocation is a strategy in which an investor takes a more active approach that tries to position a portfolio into those assets, sectors, or individual stocks that show the most potential for perceived gains. While an original asset mix is formulated much like strategic and dynamic portfolio, tactical strategies are often traded more actively and are free to move entirely in and out of their core asset classes

**Core-Satellite Asset Allocation:** Core-Satellite allocation strategies generally contain a 'core' strategic element making up the most significant portion of the portfolio, while applying a dynamic or tactical 'satellite' strategy that makes up a smaller part of the portfolio. In this way, core-satellite allocation strategies are a hybrid of the strategic and dynamic/tactical allocation strategies mentioned above.

**Fixed Income:** Fixed income is a type of investing or budgeting style for which real return rates or periodic income is received at regular intervals and at reasonably predictable levels. Fixed-income investors are typically individuals who rely on their investments to provide a regular, stable income stream. This demographic tends to invest heavily in fixed-income investments because of the reliable returns they offer. Fixed-income investors who live on set amounts of periodically paid income face the risk of inflation eroding their spending power.

Some examples of fixed-income investments include treasuries, money market instruments, corporate bonds, asset-backed securities, municipal bonds and international bonds. The primary risk associated with fixed-income investments is the borrower defaulting on his payment. Other considerations include exchange rate risk for international bonds and interest rate risk for longer-dated securities. The most common type of fixed-income security is a bond. Bonds are issued by federal governments, local municipalities and major corporations. Fixed-income securities are recommended for investors seeking a diverse portfolio; however, the percentage of the portfolio dedicated to fixed income depends on your own personal investment style. There is also an opportunity to diversify the fixed-income component of a portfolio. Riskier fixed-income products, such as junk bonds and longer-dated products, should comprise a lower percentage of your overall portfolio.

The interest payment on fixed-income securities is considered regular income and is determined based on the creditworthiness of the borrower and current market rates. In general, bonds and fixed-income securities with longer-dated maturities pay a higher rate, also referred to as the coupon rate, because they are considered riskier. The longer the security is on the market, the more time it has to lose its value and/or default. At the end of the bond term, or at bond maturity, the borrower returns the amount borrowed, also referred to as the principal or par value.

**Long-Term Purchases:** Our firm may buy securities for your account and hold them for a relatively long time (more than a year) in anticipation that the security's value will appreciate over a long horizon. The risk of this strategy is that our firm could miss out on potential short-term gains that could have been profitable to your account, or it's possible that the security's value may decline sharply before our firm makes a decision to sell.



**Options:** An option is a financial derivative that represents a contract sold by one party (the option writer) to another party (the option holder, or option buyer). The contract offers the buyer the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell a security or other financial asset at an agreed-upon price (the strike price) during a certain period of time or on a specific date (exercise date). Options are extremely versatile securities. Traders use options to speculate, which is a relatively risky practice, while hedgers use options to reduce the risk of holding an asset. In terms of speculation, option buyers and writers have conflicting views regarding the outlook on the performance of a:

- *Call Option:* Call options give the option to buy at certain price, so the buyer would want the stock to go up. Conversely, the option writer needs to provide the underlying shares in the event that the stock's market price exceeds the strike due to the contractual obligation. An option writer who sells a call option believes that the underlying stock's price will drop relative to the option's strike price during the life of the option, as that is how he will reap maximum profit. This is exactly the opposite outlook of the option buyer. The buyer believes that the underlying stock will rise; if this happens, the buyer will be able to acquire the stock for a lower price and then sell it for a profit. However, if the underlying stock does not close above the strike price on the expiration date, the option buyer would lose the premium paid for the call option.
- *Put Option:* Put options give the option to sell at a certain price, so the buyer would want the stock to go down. The opposite is true for put option writers. For example, a put option buyer is bearish on the underlying stock and believes its market price will fall below the specified strike price on or before a specified date. On the other hand, an option writer who sells a put option believes the underlying stock's price will increase about a specified price on or before the expiration date. If the underlying stock's price closes above the specified strike price on the expiration date, the put option writer's maximum profit is achieved. Conversely, a put option holder would only benefit from a fall in the underlying stock's price below the strike price. If the underlying stock's price falls below the strike price, the put option writer is obligated to purchase shares of the underlying stock at the strike price.

The potential risks associated with these transactions are that (1) all options expire. The closer the option gets to expiration, the quicker the premium in the option deteriorates; and (2) Prices can move very quickly. Depending on factors such as time until expiration and the relationship of the stock price to the option's strike price, small movements in a stock can translate into big movements in the underlying options.

**Short-Term Purchases:** When utilizing this strategy, our firm may also purchase securities with the idea of selling them within a relatively short time (typically a year or less). Our firm does this in an attempt to take advantage of conditions that our firm believes will soon result in a price swing in the securities our firm purchase.

**Structured Products:** Structured products are designed to facilitate highly customized risk-return objectives. While structured products come in many different forms, they typically consist of a debt security that is structured to make interest and principal payments based upon various assets, rates or formulas. Many structured products include an embedded derivative component. Structured products may be structured in the form of a security, in which case these products may receive benefits provided under federal securities law, or they may be cast as derivatives, in which case they are offered in the over-the-counter market and are subject to no regulation.



Investing in structured products includes significant risks, including valuation, lack of liquidity, price, credit and market risks. The relative lack of liquidity is due to the highly customized nature of the investment and the fact that the full extent of returns from the complex performance features is often not realized until maturity. Another risk with structured products is the credit quality of the issuer. Although the cash flows are derived from other sources, the products themselves are legally considered to be the issuing financial institution's liabilities. The vast majority of structured products are from high-investment-grade issuers only. Also, there is a lack of pricing transparency. There is no uniform standard for pricing, making it harder to compare the net-of-pricing attractiveness of alternative structured product offerings than it is, for instance, to compare the net expense ratios of different mutual funds or commissions among broker-dealers.

**Third-Party Money Manager Analysis:** The analysis of the experience, investment philosophies, and past performance of independent third-party investment managers in an attempt to determine if that manager has demonstrated an ability to invest over a period of time and in different economic conditions. Analysis is completed by monitoring the manager's underlying holdings, strategies, concentrations and leverage as part of our overall periodic risk assessment. Additionally, as part of the due-diligence process, the manager's compliance and business enterprise risks are surveyed and reviewed. A risk of investing with a third-party manager who has been successful in the past is that they may not be able to replicate that success in the future. In addition, as our firm does not control the underlying investments in a third-party manager's portfolio, there is also a risk that a manager may deviate from the stated investment mandate or strategy of the portfolio, making it a less suitable investment for our clients. Moreover, as our firm does not control the manager's daily business and compliance operations, our firm may be unaware of the lack of internal controls necessary to prevent business, regulatory or reputational deficiencies.

## **Risk of Loss**

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Investing in securities involves risk of loss that clients should be prepared to bear. While the stock market may increase and the account(s) could enjoy a gain, it is also possible that the stock market may decrease and the account(s) could suffer a loss. It is important that clients understand the risks associated with investing in the stock market, and that their assets are appropriately diversified in investments. Clients are encouraged to ask our firm any questions regarding their risk tolerance.

## **Description of Material, Significant or Unusual Risks**

**Credit Risk:** Credit risk can be a factor in situations where an investment's performance relies on a borrower's repayment of borrowed funds. With credit risk, an investor can experience a loss or unfavorable performance if a borrower does not repay the borrowed funds as expected or required. Investment holdings that involve forms of indebtedness (i.e. borrowed funds) are subject to credit risk.

**Cryptocurrency Risk:** When deemed appropriate, our firm may select a separate account manager that invests in digital (crypto) currency products that are issued and/or transferred using distributed ledger or blockchain technology. Such products are extremely volatile and are suitable only as a means of diversification for investors with high risk tolerances. The complexity of the products and technology underlying cryptocurrencies pose potential risks including technical, legal, market, and operational risks, price volatility, illiquidity, valuation methodology, related-party transactions, and conflicts of interest. Security is also a concern for digital currency investments which make them subject to the additional risk of theft.

**Economic Risk:** The prevailing economic environment is important to the health of all businesses. Some companies, however, are more sensitive to changes in the domestic or global economy than others. These types of companies are often referred to as cyclical businesses. Countries in which a large portion of businesses are in cyclical industries are thus also very economically sensitive and carry a higher amount of economic risk. If an investment is issued by a party located in a country that experiences wide swings from an economic standpoint or in situations where certain elements of an investment instrument are hinged on dealings in such countries, the investment instrument will generally be subject to a higher level of economic risk.

**Equity (Stock) Market Risk:** Common stocks are susceptible to general stock market fluctuations and, volatile increases and decreases in value as market confidence in and perceptions of their issuers change. If you held common stock, or common stock equivalents, of any given issuer, you would generally be exposed to greater risk than if you held preferred stocks and debt obligations of the issuer.

**Exchange Traded Notes (“ETN”) Risk:** An ETN is a senior, unsecured, unsubordinated debt security by an underwriting bank whose primary objective is to achieve the same return as a particular market index. Similar to other debt securities, the credit of the issuer is the only backing for ETNs, which have a maturity date. Although performance is contractually tied to whatever underlying index or indexes the ETN is intended to track, ETNs do not have any assets, other than a claim against their issuer for payment according to the terms of the contract. Unlike traditional mutual funds, which can only be redeemed at the end of a trading day, ETNs trade throughout the day on an exchange. ETNs, as debt instruments, are subject to risk of default by the issuing bank as counter party. This is the major design difference between ETFs and ETNs: ETFs are only subject to market risk whereas ETNs are subject to both market risk and the risk of default by the issuing bank.

**Fixed Income Securities Risk:** Typically, the values of fixed-income securities change inversely with prevailing interest rates. Therefore, a fundamental risk of fixed-income securities is interest rate risk, which is the risk that their value will generally decline as prevailing interest rates rise, which may cause your account value to likewise decrease, and vice versa. How specific fixed income securities may react to changes in interest rates will depend on the specific characteristics of each security. Fixed-income securities are also subject to credit risk, prepayment risk, valuation risk, and liquidity risk. Credit risk is the chance that a bond issuer will fail to pay interest and principal in a timely manner, or that negative perceptions of the issuer’s ability to make such payments will cause the price of a bond to decline.

**Inflation Risk:** Inflation risk involves the concern that in the future, your investment or proceeds from your investment will not be worth what they are today. Throughout time, the prices of resources and end-user products generally increase and thus, the same general goods and products today will likely be more expensive in the future. The longer an investment is held, the greater the chance that the proceeds from that investment will be worth less in the future than what they are today. Said another way, a dollar tomorrow will likely get you less than what it can today.

**Interest Rate Risk:** Certain investments involve the payment of a fixed or variable rate of interest to the investment holder. Once an investor has acquired or has acquired the rights to an investment that pays a particular rate (fixed or variable) of interest, changes in overall interest rates in the market will affect the value of the interest-paying investment(s) they hold. In general, changes in prevailing interest rates in the market will have an inverse relationship to the value of existing, interest paying investments. In other words, as interest rates move up, the value of an instrument paying a particular rate (fixed or variable) of interest will go down. The reverse is generally true as well.

**Options Risk:** Options on securities may be subject to greater fluctuations in value than an investment in the underlying securities. Additionally, options have an expiration date, which makes them “decay” in value over the amount of time they are held and can expire worthless. Purchasing and writing put and call options are highly specialized activities and entail greater than ordinary investment risks.

Our firm generally invests client cash balances in money market funds, FDIC Insured Certificates of Deposit, high-grade commercial paper and/or government backed debt instruments. Ultimately, our firm tries to achieve the highest return on client cash balances through relatively low-risk conservative investments. In most cases, at least a partial cash balance will be maintained in a money market account so that our firm may debit advisory fees for our services related to our Investment Management, and Comprehensive Wealth Management, services, as applicable.

**Private Equity Risk:** Private equity is an equity investment into non-quoted companies. The private equity investor looks at an investment prospect as investing in a company as opposed to investing in a company's stock. Private equity funds hold illiquid positions (for which there is no active secondary market) and typically only invest in the equity and debt of target companies, which are generally taken private and brought under the private equity manager's control. Risks associated with private equity include:

- **Funding Risk:** The unpredictable timing of cash flows poses funding risks to investors. Commitments are contractually binding and defaulting on payments results in the loss of private equity partnership interests. This risk is also commonly referred to as default risk.
- **Liquidity Risk:** The illiquidity of private equity partnership interests exposes investors to asset liquidity risk associated with selling in the secondary market at a discount on the reported NAV.
- **Market Risk:** The fluctuation of the market has an impact on the value of the investments held in the portfolio.
- **Capital Risk:** The realization value of private equity investments can be affected by numerous factors, including (but not limited to) the quality of the fund manager, equity market exposure, interest rates and foreign exchange.

**Variable Annuities (“VA”) Risk:** A variable annuity is a type of annuity contract that allows for the accumulation of capital on a tax-deferred basis. As opposed to a fixed annuity that offers a guaranteed interest rate and a minimum payment at annuitization, variable annuities offer investors the opportunity to generate higher rates of returns by investing in equity and bond subaccounts. If a variable annuity is annuitized for income, the income payments can vary based on the performance of the subaccounts. Risks associated with VAs may include:

- Taxes and federal penalties for early withdrawal
- Earnings taxed at ordinary income tax rates
- Mortality expense to compensate the insurance company for insurance risks
- Fees and expenses imposed for the subaccounts
- Other features with additional fees and charges
- Investment losses.

## **Item 9: Disciplinary Information**

There are no legal or disciplinary events that are material to the evaluation of our advisory business or the integrity of our management.

## **Item 10: Other Financial Industry Activities & Affiliations**

Representatives of our firm are licensed insurance agents. As a result of these transactions, they receive normal and customary commissions. A conflict of interest exists as these commissionable securities sales create an incentive to recommend products based on the compensation earned. To mitigate this potential conflict, our firm will act in the client's best interest.

StrongBox Wealth maintains a business relationship with Dynasty Financial Partners, LLC ("Dynasty"). Dynasty offers operational and back office core service support including access to a network of service providers. Through the Dynasty network of service providers, StrongBox Wealth may receive preferred pricing on trading technology, financial planning software, transition support, reporting, custody, brokerage, compliance, and other related consulting services.

While StrongBox Wealth believes this open architecture structure for operational services best serves the interests of its clients, this relationship may potentially present certain conflicts of interest due to the fact that Dynasty is paid by StrongBox Wealth or its clients for the services referenced above. In light of the foregoing, StrongBox Wealth seeks at all times to ensure that any material conflicts are addressed on a fully-disclosed basis and handled in a manner that is aligned with its clients' best interests. StrongBox Wealth does not receive any portion of the fees paid directly to Dynasty, its affiliates or the service providers made available through Dynasty's platform. In addition, StrongBox Wealth reviews such relationships, including the service providers engaged through Dynasty, on a periodic basis in an effort to ensure clients are receiving competitive rates in relation to the quality and scope of the services provided.

## **Item 11: Code of Ethics, Participation or Interest in Client Transactions & Personal Trading**

As a fiduciary, it is an investment adviser's responsibility to provide fair and full disclosure of all material facts and to act solely in the best interest of each of our clients at all times. Our fiduciary duty is the underlying principle for our firm's Code of Ethics, which includes procedures for personal securities transaction and insider trading. Our firm requires all representatives to conduct business with the highest level of ethical standards and to comply with all federal and state securities laws at all times. Upon employment with our firm, and at least annually thereafter, all representatives of our firm will acknowledge receipt, understanding and compliance with our firm's Code of Ethics. Our firm and representatives must conduct business in an honest, ethical, and fair manner and avoid all circumstances that might negatively affect or appear to affect our duty of complete loyalty to all clients. This disclosure is provided to give all clients a summary of our Code of Ethics. If a client or a potential client wishes to review our Code of Ethics in its entirety, a copy will be provided promptly upon request.

Our firm recognizes that the personal investment transactions of our representatives demands the application of a Code of Ethics with high standards and requires that all such transactions be carried out in a way that does not endanger the interest of any client. At the same time, our firm also believes that if investment goals are similar for clients and for our representatives, it is logical, and even desirable, that there be common ownership of some securities.

In order to prevent conflicts of interest, our firm has established procedures for transactions effected by our representatives for their personal accounts<sup>1</sup>. In order to monitor compliance with our personal trading policy, our firm has pre-clearance requirements and a quarterly securities transaction reporting system for all of our representatives.

Neither our firm nor a related person recommends, buys or sells for client accounts, securities in which our firm or a related person has a material financial interest without prior disclosure to the client.

Related persons of our firm may buy or sell securities and other investments that are also recommended to clients. In order to minimize this conflict of interest, our related persons will place client interests ahead of their own interests and adhere to our firm's Code of Ethics, a copy of which is available upon request.

Likewise, related persons of our firm buy or sell securities for themselves at or about the same time they buy or sell the same securities for client accounts. In order to minimize this conflict of interest, our related persons will place client interests ahead of their own interests and adhere to our firm's Code of Ethics, a copy of which is available upon request.

## Item 12: Brokerage Practices

### Custodian & Brokers Used

Our firm does not maintain custody of client assets (although our firm may be deemed to have custody of client assets if given the authority to withdraw assets from client accounts. See *Item 15 Custody*, below). Client assets must be maintained in an account at a "qualified custodian," generally a broker-dealer or bank. Our firm recommends that clients use the Schwab Advisor Services division of Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. ("Schwab"), a FINRA-registered broker-dealer, member SIPC, as the qualified custodian. Our firm is independently owned and operated, and not affiliated with Schwab. Schwab will hold client assets in a brokerage account and buy and sell securities when instructed. While our firm recommends that clients use Schwab as custodian/broker, clients will decide whether to do so and open an account with Schwab by entering into an account agreement directly with them. Our firm does not open the account. Even though the account is maintained at Schwab, our firm can still use other brokers to execute trades, as described in the next paragraph.

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of the policy, our associate's personal account generally includes any account (a) in the name of our associate, his/her spouse, his/her minor children or other dependents residing in the same household, (b) for which our associate is a trustee or executor, or (c) which our associate controls, including our client accounts which our associate controls and/or a member of his/her household has a direct or indirect beneficial interest in.

## How Brokers/Custodians Are Selected

Our firm seeks to recommend a custodian/broker who will hold client assets and execute transactions on terms that are overall most advantageous when compared to other available providers and their services. A wide range of factors are considered, including, but not limited to:

- combination of transaction execution services along with asset custody services (generally without a separate fee for custody)
- capability to execute, clear and settle trades (buy and sell securities for client accounts)
- capabilities to facilitate transfers and payments to and from accounts (wire transfers, check requests, bill payment, etc.)
- breadth of investment products made available (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, exchange traded funds (ETFs), etc.)
- availability of investment research and tools that assist in making investment decisions
- quality of services
- competitiveness of the price of those services (commission rates, margin interest rates, other fees, etc.) and willingness to negotiate them
- reputation, financial strength and stability of the provider
- prior service to our firm and our other clients
- availability of other products and services that benefit our firm, as discussed below (see *"Products & Services Available from Schwab"*)

## Custody & Brokerage Costs

Schwab generally does not charge a separate fee for custody services, but is compensated by charging commissions or other fees to clients on trades that are executed or that settle into the Schwab account. In addition to commissions, Schwab charges a flat dollar amount as a "prime broker" or "trade away" fee for each trade that our firm has executed by a different broker-dealer but where the securities bought or the funds from the securities sold are deposited (settled) into a Schwab account. These fees are in addition to the commissions or other compensation paid to the executing broker-dealer. Because of this, in order to minimize client trading costs, our firm has Schwab execute most trades for the accounts.

## Products & Services Available from Schwab

Schwab Advisor Services is Schwab's business serving independent investment advisory firms like our firm. They provide our firm and clients with access to its institutional brokerage – trading, custody, reporting and related services – many of which are not typically available to Schwab retail customers. Schwab also makes available various support services. Some of those services help manage or administer our client accounts while others help manage and grow our business. Schwab's support services are generally available on an unsolicited basis (our firm does not have to request them) and at no charge to our firm. The availability of Schwab's products and services is not based on the provision of particular investment advice, such as purchasing particular securities for clients. Here is a more detailed description of Schwab's support services:

## Services that Benefit Clients

Schwab's institutional brokerage services include access to a broad range of investment products, execution of securities transactions, and custody of client assets. The investment products available through Schwab include some to which our firm might not otherwise have access or that would



require a significantly higher minimum initial investment by firm clients. Schwab's services described in this paragraph generally benefit clients and their accounts.

### **Services that May Not Directly Benefit Clients**

Schwab also makes available other products and services that benefit our firm but may not directly benefit clients or their accounts. These products and services assist in managing and administering our client accounts. They include investment research, both Schwab's and that of third parties. This research may be used to service all or some substantial number of client accounts, including accounts not maintained at Schwab. In addition to investment research, Schwab also makes available software and other technology that:

- provides access to client account data (such as duplicate trade confirmations and account statements);
- facilitates trade execution and allocate aggregated trade orders for multiple client accounts;
- provides pricing and other market data;
- facilitates payment of our fees from our clients' accounts; and
- assists with back-office functions, recordkeeping and client reporting.

### **Services that Generally Benefit Only Our Firm**

Schwab also offers other services intended to help manage and further develop our business enterprise. These services include:

- educational conferences and events
- technology, compliance, legal, and business consulting;
- publications and conferences on practice management and business succession; and
- access to employee benefits providers, human capital consultants and insurance providers.

Schwab may provide some of these services itself. In other cases, Schwab will arrange for third-party vendors to provide the services to our firm. Schwab may also discount or waive fees for some of these services or pay all or a part of a third party's fees. Schwab may also provide our firm with other benefits, such as occasional business entertainment for our personnel.

Irrespective of direct or indirect benefits to our client through Schwab, our firm strives to enhance the client experience, help clients reach their goals and put client interests before that of our firm or associated persons.

### **Our Interest in Schwab's Services**

The availability of these services from Schwab benefits our firm because our firm does not have to produce or purchase them. Our firm does not have to pay for these services, and they are not contingent upon committing any specific amount of business to Schwab in trading commissions or assets in custody.

In light of our arrangements with Schwab, a conflict of interest exists as our firm may have incentive to require that clients maintain their accounts with Schwab based on our interest in receiving Schwab's services that benefit our firm rather than based on client interest in receiving the best value in custody services and the most favorable execution of transactions. As part of our fiduciary duty to our clients, our firm will endeavor at all times to put the interests of our clients first. Clients should be aware, however, that the receipt of economic benefits by our firm or our related persons creates



a potential conflict of interest and may indirectly influence our firm's choice of Schwab as a custodial recommendation. Our firm examined this potential conflict of interest when our firm chose to recommend Schwab and has determined that the recommendation is in the best interest of our firm's clients and satisfies our fiduciary obligations, including our duty to seek best execution.

In seeking best execution, the determinative factor is not the lowest possible cost, but whether the transaction represents the best qualitative execution, taking into consideration the full range of a broker-dealer's services, including the value of research provided, execution capability, commission rates, and responsiveness. Although our firm will seek competitive rates, to the benefit of all clients, our firm may not necessarily obtain the lowest possible commission rates for specific client account transactions. Our firm believes that the selection of Schwab as a custodian and broker is the best interest of our clients. It is primarily supported by the scope, quality and price of Schwab's services, and not Schwab's services that only benefit our firm.

### **Transition Assistance Benefits**

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Schwab provided our firm, its related persons, and firm clients, assistance with the transition of their associated business to Schwab's platform. The proceeds made available as Transition Assistance were intended for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to: offsetting account transfer fees ("ACAT") that our clients might have otherwise incurred, legal services related to the formation of the advisory firm, technology set-up fees, marketing and mailing costs, stationary and licensure transfer fees.

Our firm attempts to mitigate these conflicts of interest by evaluating and recommending that Clients use Schwab's services based on the benefits that such services provide, rather than the Transition Assistance made available to our firm. We consider Schwab's suite of services when recommending that Clients maintain accounts with Schwab. Clients should, however, be aware there was a conflict of interest and take this into consideration when deciding whether to custody their assets in an advisory account at Schwab.

### **Client Brokerage Commissions**

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Schwab does not make client brokerage commissions generated by client transactions available for our firm's use.

### **Client Transactions in Return for Soft Dollars**

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Our firm does not direct client transactions to a particular broker-dealer in return for soft dollar benefits.

### **Brokerage for Client Referrals**

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Our firm does not receive brokerage for client referrals.

### **Directed Brokerage**

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Neither our firm nor any of our firm's representatives have discretionary authority in making the determination of the brokers-dealers and/or custodians with whom orders for the purchase or sale of securities are placed for execution, and the commission rates at which such securities transactions

are effected. Our firm routinely recommends that clients direct us to execute through a specified broker-dealer. Our firm recommends the use of Schwab. Each client will be required to establish their account(s) with Schwab if not already done. Please note that not all advisers have this requirement.

### **Special Considerations for ERISA Clients**

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A retirement or ERISA plan client may direct all or part of portfolio transactions for its account through a specific broker or dealer in order to obtain goods or services on behalf of the plan. Such direction is permitted provided that the goods and services provided are reasonable expenses of the plan incurred in the ordinary course of its business for which it otherwise would be obligated and empowered to pay. ERISA prohibits directed brokerage arrangements when the goods or services purchased are not for the exclusive benefit of the plan. Consequently, our firm will request that plan sponsors who direct plan brokerage provide us with a letter documenting that this arrangement will be for the exclusive benefit of the plan.

### **Client-Directed Brokerage**

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Our firm allows clients to direct brokerage outside our recommendation. Our firm may be unable to achieve the most favorable execution of client transactions. Client directed brokerage may cost clients more money. For example, in a directed brokerage account, clients may pay higher brokerage commissions because our firm may not be able to aggregate orders to reduce transaction costs, or clients may receive less favorable prices.

### **Prime Brokerage**

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Our firm participates in prime brokerage services provided by different bond traders. Orders shall be transmitted to the bond company(ies) for the execution of trades. Schwab clears our prime brokerage transactions in our block trading brokerage account established in the name of StrongBox Wealth and designated for our client account holders in an allocation established by us prior to placing orders. In certain cases, our firm may determine that it is more cost effective to trade away from Schwab and select a different prime broker to execute the transaction.

Pursuant to a prime brokerage services agreement, Schwab or the selected prime broker will maintain all details of each prime brokerage transaction, including, but not limited to, contract amount, the security involved, the number of shares or units, and whether the transaction was a long or short sale or a purchase.

### **Aggregation of Purchase or Sale**

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Our firm provides investment management services for various clients. There are occasions on which portfolio transactions may be executed as part of concurrent authorizations to purchase or sell the same security for numerous accounts served by our firm, which involve accounts with similar investment objectives. Although such concurrent authorizations potentially could be either advantageous or disadvantageous to any one or more particular accounts, they are affected only when our firm believes that to do so will be in the best interest of the effected accounts. When such concurrent authorizations occur, the objective is to allocate the executions in a manner which is deemed equitable to the accounts involved. In any given situation, our firm attempts to allocate trade executions in the most equitable manner possible, taking into consideration client objectives, current asset allocation and availability of funds using price averaging, proration and consistently non-arbitrary methods of allocation.

## Item 13: Review of Accounts or Financial Plans

Our management personnel or financial advisors review accounts on at least an annual basis for our Investment Management, and Comprehensive Wealth Management, clients. The nature of these reviews is to learn whether client accounts are in line with their investment objectives, appropriately positioned based on market conditions, and investment policies, if applicable. Our firm does not provide written reports to clients, unless asked to do so. Verbal reports to clients take place on at least an annual basis when our Investment Management, and Comprehensive Wealth Management, clients are contacted.

Our firm may review client accounts more frequently than described above. Among the factors which may trigger an off-cycle review are major market or economic events, the client's life events, requests by the client, etc.

Financial Planning clients do not receive reviews of their written plans unless they take action to schedule a financial consultation with us. Our firm does not provide ongoing services to financial planning clients, but are willing to meet with such clients upon their request to discuss updates to their plans, changes in their circumstances, etc. Financial Planning clients do not receive written or verbal updated reports regarding their financial plans unless they separately engage our firm for a post-financial plan meeting or update to their initial written financial plan.

Retirement Plan Consulting clients receive reviews of their retirement plans for the duration of the service. Our firm also provides ongoing services where clients are met with upon their request to discuss updates to their plans, changes in their circumstances, etc. Retirement Plan Consulting clients do not receive written or verbal updated reports regarding their plans unless they choose to engage our firm for ongoing services.

## Item 14: Client Referrals & Other Compensation

### Schwab

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Our firm receives economic benefit from Schwab in the form of the support products and services made available to our firm and other independent investment advisors that have their clients maintain accounts at Schwab. These products and services, how they benefit our firm, and the related conflicts of interest are described above (*see Item 12 – Brokerage Practices*). The availability of Schwab's products and services is not based on our firm giving particular investment advice, such as buying particular securities for our clients.

### Product Sponsor Funded Events

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Various product wholesalers provide financial assistance to allow us to sponsor client educational seminars, or attend such seminars hosted by the product sponsor. This money is not directly tied to our use of their products, nor it is contingent upon any future business to be directed to their products. Nonetheless, it creates a conflict of interest that may incentivize us to utilize their products.

Our firm will adhere to our fiduciary duty to act in our client's best interest when selecting what products to use in client accounts.

## **Referral Fees**

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In accordance with Rule 206 (4)-1 of the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, our firm provides cash or non-cash compensation directly or indirectly to unaffiliated persons for testimonials or endorsements (which include client referrals). Such compensation arrangements will not result in higher costs to the referred client. In this regard, our firm maintains a written agreement with each unaffiliated person that is compensated for testimonials or endorsements in an aggregate amount of \$1,000 or more (or the equivalent value in non-cash compensation) over a trailing 12-month period in compliance with Rule 206 (4)-1 of the Investment Advisers Act of 1940 and applicable state and federal laws. The following information will be disclosed clearly and prominently to referred prospective clients at the time of each testimonial or endorsement:

- Whether or not the unaffiliated person is a current client of our firm,
- A description of the cash or non-cash compensation provided directly or indirectly by our firm to the unaffiliated person in exchange for the referral, if applicable, and
- A brief statement of any material conflicts of interest on the part of the unaffiliated person giving the referral resulting from our firm's relationship with such unaffiliated person.

In cases where state law requires licensure of solicitors, our firm ensures that no solicitation fees are paid unless the solicitor is registered as an investment adviser representative of our firm. If our firm is paying solicitation fees to another registered investment adviser, the licensure of individuals is the other firm's responsibility.

## **Item 15: Custody**

While our firm does not maintain physical custody of client assets (which are maintained by a qualified custodian, as discussed above), we are deemed to have custody of certain client assets if given the authority to withdraw assets from client accounts, as further described below under "Standing Instructions." All our clients receive account statements directly from their qualified custodian(s) at least quarterly upon opening of an account. We urge our clients to carefully review these statements. Additionally, if our firm decides to send its own account statements to clients, such statements will include a legend that recommends the client compare the account statements received from the qualified custodian with those received from our firm.

### **Standing Instructions:**

On February 21, 2017, the SEC issued a no-action letter ("Letter") with respect to Rule 206(4)-2 ("Custody Rule") under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940 ("Advisers Act"). The letter provided guidance on the Custody Rule as well as clarified that an adviser who has the power to disburse client funds to a third party under a standing letter of instruction ("SLOA") is deemed to have custody. As such, our firm has adopted the following safeguards in conjunction with our custodian:

- The client provides an instruction to the qualified custodian, in writing, that includes the client's signature, the third party's name, and either the third party's address or the third party's account number at a custodian to which the transfer should be directed.

- The client authorizes the investment adviser, in writing, either on the qualified custodian's form or separately, to direct transfers to the third party either on a specified schedule or from time to time.
- The client's qualified custodian performs appropriate verification of the instruction, such as a signature review or other method to verify the client's authorization, and provides a transfer of funds notice to the client promptly after each transfer.
- The client has the ability to terminate or change the instruction to the client's qualified custodian.
- The investment adviser has no authority or ability to designate or change the identity of the third party, the address, or any other information about the third party contained in the client's instruction.
- The investment adviser maintains records showing that the third party is not a related party of the investment adviser or located at the same address as the investment adviser.
- The client's qualified custodian sends the client, in writing, an initial notice confirming the instruction and an annual notice reconfirming the instruction.

Clients are encouraged to raise any questions with us about the custody, safety or security of their assets and our custodial recommendations.

### **Item 16: Investment Discretion**

Clients have the option of providing our firm with investment discretion on their behalf, pursuant to an executed investment advisory client agreement. By granting investment discretion, our firm is authorized to execute securities transactions, determine which securities are bought and sold, and the total amount to be bought and sold. Should clients grant our firm non-discretionary authority, our firm would be required to obtain the client's permission prior to effecting securities transactions. Limitations may be imposed by the client in the form of specific constraints on any of these areas of discretion with our firm's written acknowledgement.

### **Item 17: Voting Client Securities**

Our firm does not accept the proxy authority to vote client securities. Clients will receive proxies or other solicitations directly from their custodian or a transfer agent. In the event that proxies are sent to our firm, our firm will forward them to the appropriate client and ask the party who sent them to mail them directly to the client in the future. Clients may call, write or email us to discuss questions they may have about particular proxy votes or other solicitations.

### **Item 18: Financial Information**

Our firm is not required to provide financial information in this Brochure because:

- Our firm does not require the prepayment of more than \$1,200 in fees when services cannot be rendered within 6 months.

- Our firm does not take custody of client funds or securities.
- Our firm does not have a financial condition or commitment that impairs our ability to meet contractual and fiduciary obligations to clients.

Our firm has never been the subject of a bankruptcy proceeding.