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MARKET REVIEW

Global equities remained steady for most of the month but sold off in the final days, as investors awaited key US elections, navigated heightened geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, and assessed ongoing policy easing measures. Favorable US economic data, including subdued inflation, drove expectations that the US Federal Reserve (Fed) may slow its pace of rate cuts. This sentiment was further emphasized by the notable rise in 10-year Treasury yields, which reached 4.28% in October, up from a 15-month low of 3.62% in late September, underscoring the market's expectations for the pace of Fed rate cuts, positive economic indicators, and improved prospects for a soft landing. In Europe, third-quarter GDP exceeded expectations, and the European Central Bank lowered interest rates by 25 basis points, to 3.25%, amid waning inflation and a weak economic outlook. Emerging markets faced pressure from a stronger US dollar, while the conflict in the Middle East reached its one-year mark, with military strikes escalating between Israel and Iran.

The FTSE EPRA/NAREIT Developed NET returned -5.1% for the period. Within the index, 12 out of 14 sectors declined for the month. Self-storage facilities and warehouse were the bottom performing sectors, while real estate technology and healthcare real estate were the top performing sectors over the period.

FUND PERFORMANCE AND ATTRIBUTION

- The fund outperformed the index over the month, however delivered negative returns.
- Security selection was a driver of relative outperformance. Strong selection in office, diversified and healthcare real estate was partially offset by selection in home builder. Sector allocation, a result of our bottom-up stock selection process, also contributed to returns. Allocation effect was driven by our underweight to warehouse and overweight to healthcare real estate and home builder, but partially offset by our underweight to real estate technology and office and overweight to real estate service company.
- At the issuer level, our top two relative contributors were overweights to SL Green Realty and Welltower, while our top two relative detractors were an underweight to Digital Realty Trust and an out of benchmark allocation to Sekisui House Ltd.
- The share price of SL Green Realty rose during the month following the announcement of its Q3 earnings results. Despite reporting a miss on FFO, net rental revenue increased. The company has seen strong leasing momentum year-to-date and expects to surpass its FY24 leasing goal. Additionally, SL Green's 925,000 square-foot renewal and expansion with Bloomberg positively impacted the stock price. Shares of Digital Realty Trust rose after the company announced Q3 FFO and Revenue in line with estimates at the end of the month. Additionally, the company reported rental rate increases on renewal leases and the total signed bookings during 3Q24 are expected to generate \$521M of annualized GAAP rental revenue. As a result, management raised its 2024 Core FFO and Constant-Currency Core FFO.

FUND POSITIONING AND OUTLOOK

Over the past twelve months the market has wrestled with where growth and inflation will stabilize. Volatile base effects have made an assessment challenging. Still, the swings in market expectations have been extreme, ranging from 7+ rate cuts to a right hike. Betting that the pendulum of sentiment will swing back and forth has been fruitful. As such we believe recent economic negativity is unwarranted. Concerns that the Fed was behind the curve should abate following a 50bps rate cut, which we believe materially takes the risk of recession off the table. While growth has decelerated in recent months, we believe the combination of US rates cuts, Chinese stimulus, and a weakening dollar will stabilize an already healthy economy and labor market in the US. Interestingly, both the ISM and the Financial Conditions Index (FCI) rose in September. Inflation is also poised to reaccelerate with the Shanghai Shipping Index and apartment rents moving higher. We suspect the Fed will be changing their tune on rate cuts by early 2025. In fact, we see a greater risk to no landing than a soft landing. These factors caused us to shift our portfolios more cyclical. However, the outcome of the US election will have a significant impact on future growth and inflation. Consequently, we will be ready to pivot again if necessary.

Historically, REIT performance is mixed during periods of accelerating inflation with better performance in periods of weaker growth than stronger growth, interest rates being the key variable. We believe rates are range bound between 3.5% and 5.0%, but that is predicated on not seeing inflationary government policies, such as tariffs. This cycle, we see REITs as being a better inflation hedge due to low new supply, creating a backdrop for sustained rent growth. With a base case of structurally higher inflation, we are underweight long lease duration and leverage in favor of economic sensitivity and business models that can generate income growth greater than inflation such as data centers, lodging, senior housing, advertising, office, home builders. We also favor regions with greater political stability such as the UK, Japan and the UAE.

At the end of the period, our largest overweights were home builder and lodging. We were most underweight to specialty finance and warehouse. From a regional perspective, our largest overweights were Developed Europe & Middle East ex UK and United Kingdom. We were most underweight to Developed Asia Pacific ex Japan and North America.

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