

# Evaluation and Approval of Advisory Contract – November 2020

## **FEDERATED HERMES CONSERVATIVE MUNICIPAL MICROSHORT FUND (THE “FUND”)**

At its meetings in November 2020 (the “November Meetings”), the Fund’s Board of Trustees (the “Board”), including a majority of those Trustees who are not “interested persons” of the Fund, as defined in the Investment Company Act of 1940 (the “Independent Trustees”), reviewed and unanimously approved for an initial two-year term a proposed investment advisory contract (the “Contract”) between the Fund and Federated Investment Management Company (the “Adviser”). The Board’s determination to approve the Contract reflects the exercise of its business judgment regarding whether to authorize the creation and offering of this new investment vehicle, as proposed by Federated Hermes, Inc. (together with its wholly owned subsidiaries, “Federated Hermes”), and is based on information requested by the Board and provided by Federated Hermes, as well as Federated Hermes’ recommendation to go forward with development of the Fund. The information, factors and conclusions that formed the basis for the Board’s approval are summarized below.

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

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

In addition to the extensive materials that comprise and accompany the CCO Fee Evaluation Report, the Board considered the materials and presentations provided by Federated Hermes and the CCO’s independent written evaluation in connection with its annual approval of the continuation of the advisory and subadvisory contracts for the other funds advised by the Adviser and its affiliates (each, a “Federated Hermes Fund”) at its May 2020 meetings. The Board also considered such additional matters as the Independent Trustees deemed reasonably necessary to evaluate the proposed Contract, which included information furnished to the Board at its meetings throughout the year regarding the Federated Hermes Funds.

The Board’s consideration of the Contract included review of materials and information covering the following matters, among others: the Adviser’s investment philosophy, revenue, profitability, personnel and processes; investment and operating strategies; the Fund’s proposed investment objective; the Fund’s anticipated expenses, including the proposed advisory fee and the overall estimated expense structure of the Fund (both in absolute terms and relative to a group of its peer funds), with due regard for contractual or voluntary expense limitations (if any); the use and allocation of brokerage commissions to be derived from trading the Fund’s portfolio securities (if any); and the nature, quality and extent of the advisory and other services to be provided to the Fund by the Adviser and its affiliates. The Board also considered the preferences and expectations of anticipated Fund shareholders; the entrepreneurial and other risks assumed by the Adviser in sponsoring and managing the Fund; the continuing state of competition in the mutual fund industry and market practices; the range of comparable fees for similar funds in the mutual fund industry; the Fund’s proposed relationship to the other Federated Hermes Funds, which include a comprehensive array of funds with different investment objectives, policies and strategies which are generally available for exchange without the incurrence of additional sales charges; compliance and audit reports concerning the Federated Hermes Funds and the Federated Hermes’ affiliates that service them (including any communications from regulatory agencies), as well as Federated Hermes’ responses to any issues raised therein; and relevant developments in the mutual fund industry and how the Federated Hermes Funds and/or Federated Hermes may be responding to them. In addition, the Board received and considered information furnished by Federated Hermes on the impacts of the on-going coronavirus pandemic on Federated Hermes, including, among other information, the current and anticipated impacts on the proposed management and operations of the Fund. The Board noted that its evaluation process is evolutionary and that the criteria considered and the emphasis placed on relevant criteria may change in recognition of changing circumstances in the mutual fund marketplace.

The Board also considered judicial decisions concerning allegedly excessive investment advisory fees in determining to approve the Contract. Using these judicial decisions as a guide, the Board observed that the following factors may be relevant to an adviser’s fiduciary duty with respect to its receipt of compensation from a fund: (1) the nature and quality of the services provided by an adviser to a fund and its shareholders (including the performance of the fund, its benchmark, and comparable funds); (2) an adviser’s cost of providing the services (including the profitability to an adviser of providing advisory services to a fund); (3) the extent to which an adviser may realize “economies of scale” as a fund grows larger and, if such economies of scale exist, whether they have been shared with a fund and its shareholders or the family of funds; (4) any “fall-out” financial benefits that accrue to an adviser because of its relationship with a fund (including research services received from brokers that execute fund trades and any fees paid to affiliates of an adviser for

services rendered to a fund); (5) comparative fee and expense structures (including a comparison of fees paid to an adviser with those paid by similar funds both internally and externally as well as management fees charged to institutional and other advisory clients of the adviser for what might be viewed as like services); and (6) the extent of care, conscientiousness and independence with which the fund's board members perform their duties and their expertise (including whether they are fully informed about all facts the board deems relevant to its consideration of an adviser's services and fees). The Board noted that the Securities and Exchange Commission's ("SEC") disclosure requirements regarding the basis for a fund board's approval of the fund's investment advisory contracts generally align with the factors listed above. The Board was aware of these factors and was guided by them in its review of the proposed Contract to the extent it considered them to be appropriate and relevant, as discussed further below. The Board recognized that certain of the factors listed above (relating to such matters as anticipated Fund performance and any indirect benefits that may accrue to Federated Hermes as a result of the Adviser's proposed relationship with the Fund) are essentially impossible to apply before the Fund has experienced any meaningful operating history.

The Board considered and weighed these factors in light of its substantial accumulated experience in governing the Federated Hermes Funds and working with Federated Hermes on matters relating to the Federated Hermes Funds. While individual members of the Board may have weighed certain factors differently, the Board's determination to approve the Contract was based on a comprehensive consideration of all information provided to the Board. The Independent Trustees were assisted throughout the evaluation process by independent legal counsel. In connection with their deliberations at the November Meetings, the Independent Trustees met separately in executive session with their independent legal counsel and without management present to review the relevant materials and consider their responsibilities under applicable laws. In addition, senior management representatives of Federated Hermes also met with the Independent Trustees and their independent legal counsel to discuss the materials and presentations furnished to the Board at the November Meetings.

#### **Nature, Extent and Quality of Services to be Provided**

The Board considered the nature, extent and quality of the services to be provided to the Fund by the Adviser and the resources of the Adviser and its affiliates to be dedicated to the Fund. In this regard, the Board evaluated, among other things, the Adviser's personnel, experience and track record, as well as the financial resources and overall reputation of Federated Hermes and its willingness to invest in personnel and infrastructure that benefit the Federated Hermes Funds. The Board also considered its past experience with the Adviser with respect to the services it provides to other Federated Hermes Funds. The Board noted the significant acquisition of Hermes Fund Managers Limited by Federated Hermes in 2018, which has deepened the organization's investment management expertise and capabilities and expanded the investment process for all of the Federated Hermes Funds to incorporate environmental, social and governance ("ESG") factors and issuer engagement on ESG matters.

In addition, the Board reviewed the qualifications, backgrounds and responsibilities of the portfolio management team to be primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the Fund and the Adviser's ability and experience in attracting and retaining qualified personnel to service the proposed Fund. In particular, the Board considered the abilities and experience of the portfolio management team in managing short duration, tax-exempt fixed income portfolios. The Board noted the compliance program of the Adviser and the compliance-related resources that would be devoted by the Adviser and its affiliates in support of the Fund's obligations pursuant to Rule 38a-1 under the Investment Company Act of 1940, including the Adviser's commitment to respond to rulemaking and other regulatory initiatives of the SEC, such as the liquidity risk management program rules. In addition, the Board considered the response by the Adviser to recent market conditions with respect to other Federated Hermes Funds and considered the overall performance of the Adviser in this context. The Adviser's anticipated ability to execute the proposed Fund's investment program was one of the Board's considerations in reaching a conclusion that, with due regard for the fact that the Fund did not yet have an operating history, the nature, extent and quality of the Adviser's investment management and related services warrant the approval of the Contract.

#### **Fund Investment Performance**

Recognizing that the Fund is new and has no performance history, the Board did not consider the performance history of the Fund. Instead, the Board considered the investment performance of the Adviser, including, for purposes of considering the investment skill and experience of the Adviser in managing another Federated Hermes Fund with a short duration, tax-exempt fixed income portfolio, performance data showing the Adviser's capabilities in managing the Federated Hermes Municipal Ultrashort Fund. The Board also received additional information about the broad range of the portfolio management team's investment experience and their investment philosophy and process, including with respect to the Fund's proposed investments in investment-grade, tax-exempt fixed income securities.

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

### **Fund Expenses**

While mindful that courts have cautioned against giving too much weight to comparative information concerning fees charged by other advisers for managing funds with comparable investment programs, the Board has found the use of such comparisons to be relevant to its deliberations. In this regard, the Board was presented with, and considered, information regarding the proposed contractual advisory fee rates, proposed net advisory fee rates, anticipated total expense ratios and each element of the Fund's anticipated total expense ratio (i.e., gross and net advisory fees, custody fees, portfolio accounting fees and transfer agency fees) relative to funds with an institutional share class within the category of peer funds selected by Morningstar, Inc., an independent fund ranking organization (the "Peer Group"). The Board noted the CCO's view that comparisons to fund peer groups may be helpful, though not conclusive, in evaluating the reasonableness of the Fund's fees. The Board considered, in evaluating such comparisons, that in some cases there may be differences in the funds' objectives or investment management techniques, or the costs to implement the funds, even within the same Peer Group. The Board focused on comparisons with other similar mutual funds more heavily than non-mutual fund products or services because such comparisons are believed to be more relevant. The Board considered that other mutual funds are the products most like the Fund, in that they are readily available to Fund shareholders as alternative investment vehicles, and they are the type of investment vehicle, in fact, anticipated to be chosen and maintained by the Fund's anticipated investors. The Board noted that the range of their fees and expenses, therefore, appears to be a relevant indicator of what consumers have found to be reasonable in the marketplace in which the Fund will compete.

The Board reviewed the proposed contractual advisory fee rate, proposed net advisory fee rate and proposed other expenses of the Fund and noted the position of the Fund's proposed fee rates relative to its Peer Group. In this regard, the Board noted that the proposed contractual advisory fee rate of the Fund was below the median of the Peer Group.

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

The Board considered the CCO's conclusion that the proposed management fee was reasonable. The Board reviewed the proposed fees and other expenses of the Fund and was satisfied that the proposed overall expense structure of the Fund appeared to be appropriate.

### **Profitability and Other Benefits**

In connection with the Board's governance of other Federated Hermes Funds, the Board regularly receives financial information about Federated Hermes, including information regarding the compensation and ancillary (or "fall-out") benefits Federated Hermes derived from its relationships with the Federated Hermes Funds. This information covers not only the fees under the Federated Hermes Funds' investment advisory contracts, but also fees received by Federated Hermes' affiliates for providing other services to the Federated Hermes Funds under separate contracts (e.g., for serving as the Federated Hermes Funds' administrator and distributor). The information also details any indirect benefit Federated Hermes may derive from its receipt of research services from brokers who execute portfolio trades for the Federated Hermes Funds. In addition, the Board considered the fact that, in order for the Federated Hermes Funds to be competitive in the marketplace, the Adviser and its affiliates frequently waived fees and/or reimbursed expenses and have disclosed to Federated Hermes Fund shareholders and/or reported to the Board their intention to do so in the future. Moreover, the Board received and considered regular reports from Federated Hermes throughout the year as to the institution, adjustment or elimination of these voluntary waivers and/or reimbursements. The Board also considered that Federated Hermes has been active in managing expenses for the Federated Hermes Funds.

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

The Board also considered information regarding the CCO's review of information compiled by Federated Hermes comparing its profitability information to other publicly held fund management companies, including information regarding profitability trends over time. The Board considered that the CCO noted that Federated Hermes regularly undertakes to establish new Federated Hermes Funds and maintains a number of other smaller Federated Hermes Funds that, while expected to grow to a greater size, nevertheless require substantial investment and waiver or assumption of fees and other expenses in order to deliver them to the marketplace. The Board considered the CCO's conclusion that, based on such profitability information, Federated Hermes' profit margins did not appear to be excessive. The Board also considered the CCO's view that Federated Hermes appeared financially sound, with the resources necessary to fulfill its obligations under its contracts with the Federated Hermes Funds, including the proposed Contract.

### **Economies of Scale**

The Board received and considered information about the notion of possible realization of "economies of scale" as a fund grows larger, the difficulties of calculating economies of scale at an individual fund level, and the extent to which potential scale benefits are shared with shareholders. In this regard, the Board considered that Federated Hermes has made significant and long-term investments in areas that support all of the Federated Hermes Funds, such as personnel and processes for the portfolio management, trading operations, issuer engagement (including with respect to ESG matters), shareholder services, compliance, business continuity, internal audit and risk management functions, as well as systems technology (including technology relating to cybersecurity) and use of data. The Board noted that Federated Hermes' investments in these areas are extensive and are designed to provide enhanced services to the Federated Hermes Funds and their shareholders. The Board considered that the benefits of these investments (as well as the benefits of any economies of scale, should they exist) are likely to be shared with the Federated Hermes Fund family as a whole. In addition, the Board considered that the Adviser and its affiliates have frequently waived fees and/or reimbursed expenses for the Federated Hermes Funds and that such waivers and reimbursements are another means for potential economies of scale to be shared with shareholders and can provide protection from an increase in expenses if a Federated Hermes Fund's assets decline. The Board noted the fee waiver arrangement proposed for the Fund.

In connection with the Board's governance of other Federated Hermes Funds, the Board regularly receives information furnished by Federated Hermes regarding adviser-paid fees (commonly referred to as revenue sharing). The Board considered the beliefs of Federated Hermes and the CCO that this information should be viewed to determine if there was an incentive to either not apply breakpoints, or to apply breakpoints at higher levels, and should not be viewed to determine the appropriateness of advisory fees. The Board also noted the absence of any applicable regulatory or industry guidelines on this subject, which is compounded by the lack of any common industry practice or general pattern with respect to structuring fund advisory fees with "breakpoints" that serve to reduce the fee as a fund attains a certain size. The Board considered that the CCO did not recommend institution of breakpoints in pricing Federated Hermes' proposed advisory services to the Fund at this time, noting that it would review future asset growth and the appropriateness of any potential future breakpoints as part of its future annual review of the Contract.

### **Conclusions**

The Board considered the CCO's conclusion that his observations and the information accompanying the CCO Fee Evaluation Report show that the proposed management fee for the Fund was reasonable and the CCO's recommendation that the Board approve the proposed management fee.

The Board based its determination to approve the proposed Contract on the totality of the circumstances and relevant factors and with a view to past and future long-term considerations. Not all of the factors and considerations identified above were necessarily deemed to be relevant to the Fund, nor did the Board consider any one of them to be determinative. With respect to the factors that were deemed to be relevant, the Board's determination to approve the proposed Contract

reflects its view that, based upon the information requested and supplied, Federated Hermes' proposal to establish and manage the Fund and its past performance and actions in providing services to other Federated Hermes Funds (which the Board has found to be satisfactory with respect to such other Federated Hermes Funds) provided a satisfactory basis to support the determination to approve the proposed arrangement.