FOMC Update – December 15, 2021

By: Steve Brown, President & CEO of PCBB

The FOMC left the overnight rate unchanged again, acknowledging the continued recovery in economic activity and the labor market. However, in a clear signal to financial markets, the statement also announced that the pace of Treasury and Agency securities reduction is being meaningfully accelerated, suggesting that the tightening cycle may be happening sooner, and more pronounced, than previously signaled. Citing elevated inflation caused by the supply chain disruption, the Committee also signaled that it may accelerate the timeline even further from this point in coming months. Overall, today's announcement continues the recent trend of FOMC statements gradually moving in that direction, although it caught the bond market slightly by surprise.

Rates and Market:

- Fed Funds Target: 0% – 0.25%
- Policy Bias: Accommodative
- Market Reaction: Short end yields jumped about 5 bps following the announcement

The FOMC announced the following actions and analysis:

- 11-0 vote
- Economic activity has continued to strengthen
- Inflation is elevated, largely due to supply chain disruptions
- Risks to the economic outlook remain

The Statement:

The Federal Reserve is committed to using its full range of tools to support the U.S. economy in this challenging time, thereby promoting its maximum employment and price stability goals.

With progress on vaccinations and strong policy support, indicators of economic activity and employment have continued to strengthen. The sectors most adversely affected by the pandemic have improved in recent months but continue to be affected by COVID-19. Job gains have been solid in recent months, and the unemployment rate has declined substantially. Supply and demand imbalances related to the pandemic and the reopening of the economy have continued to contribute to elevated levels of inflation. Overall financial conditions remain accommodative, in part reflecting policy measures to support the economy and the flow of credit to U.S. households and businesses.

The path of the economy continues to depend on the course of the virus. Progress on vaccinations and an easing of supply constraints are expected to support continued gains in economic activity and employment as well as a reduction in inflation. Risks to the economic outlook remain, including from new variants of the virus.

The Committee seeks to achieve maximum employment and inflation at the rate of 2 percent over the longer run. In support of these goals, the Committee decided to keep the target range for the federal funds rate at 0 to 1/4 percent. With inflation having exceeded 2 percent for some time, the Committee expects it will be appropriate to maintain this target range until labor market conditions have reached levels consistent with the Committee's assessments of maximum employment. In light of inflation developments and the further improvement in the labor market, the Committee decided to reduce the monthly pace of its net asset purchases by $20 billion for Treasury securities and $10 billion for agency mortgage-backed securities. Beginning in January, the Committee will increase its holdings of Treasury securities by at least $40 billion per month and of agency mortgage backed securities by at least $20 billion per month. The Committee judges that similar reductions in the pace of net asset purchases will likely be appropriate each month, but it is prepared to adjust the pace of purchases if warranted by changes in the economic outlook. The Federal Reserve's ongoing purchases and holdings of securities will continue to foster smooth market functioning and accommodative financial conditions, thereby supporting the flow of credit to households and businesses.

In assessing the appropriate stance of monetary policy, the Committee will continue to monitor the implications of incoming information for the economic outlook. The Committee would be prepared to adjust the stance of monetary policy as appropriate if risks emerge that could impede the attainment of the Committee's goals. The Committee's assessments will take into account a wide range of information, including readings on public health, labor market conditions, inflation pressures and inflation expectations, and financial and international developments.

Voting for the monetary policy action were Jerome H. Powell, Chair; John C. Williams, Vice Chair; Thomas I. Barkin; Raphael W. Bostic; Michelle W. Bowman; Lael Brainard; Richard H. Clarida; Mary C. Daly; Charles L. Evans; Randal K. Quarles; and Christopher J. Waller.

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About Steve Brown:

Steve has over 30 years of banking and capital markets experience, is frequently quoted in the press on banking issues and trends and is a regular speaker at industry conferences. He is also the author of the popular Banc Investment Daily, distributed to over 75,000 community bankers and regulators nationwide. Steve joined PCBB in 2002, where he was CEO of its broker dealer subsidiary and later became President/CEO of PCBB in 2007. Prior to joining PCBB, Steve was cofounder of a financial technology (fintech) company; ran a sales group at Bank of America Securities focused on community banks; and was on the sales team at the world's largest wholesale broker of federal funds, interest rate hedging and foreign exchange. Steve began his banking career in the finance and treasury departments of a large community bank in Arizona in the mid-1980's.