

SOUTHERN FIRST BANCSHARES INC

Form 10-K

February 28, 2019

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**UNITED STATES  
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION  
Washington, D.C. 20549  
FORM 10-K**

**Annual Report Pursuant To Section 13 Or 15(d) of The Securities Exchange Act of 1934**  
For The Fiscal Year December 31, 2018.

Or

**Transition Report Pursuant To Section 13 Or 15(d) of The Securities Exchange Act of 1934**  
For the Transition Period from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
Commission file number 000-27719

## Southern First Bancshares, Inc.

(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

**South Carolina**  
(State of Incorporation)

**58-2459561**  
(I.R.S. Employer Identification No.)

**100 Verdae Boulevard, Greenville, SC**  
(Address of principal executive offices)

**29607**  
(Zip Code)

**864-679-9000**  
(Telephone Number)

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act:

Title of class  
**Common Stock**

Name of each exchange on which registered  
**The NASDAQ Global Market**

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(g) of the Act: None

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is a well-known seasoned issuer, as defined in Rule 405 of the Securities Act. Yes  No

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the Exchange Act. Yes  No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days. Yes  No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant has submitted electronically every Interactive Data File required to be submitted and posted pursuant to Rule 405 of Regulation S-T (§ 232.405 of this chapter) during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to submit and post such files). Yes  No

Indicate by check mark if disclosure of delinquent filers pursuant to Item 405 of Regulation S-K is not contained herein, and will not be contained, to the best of registrant's knowledge, in definitive proxy or information statements incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K or any amendment to this Form 10-K.

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer, a smaller reporting company, or emerging growth company. See definitions of "large accelerated filer," "accelerated filer," "smaller reporting company," and "emerging growth company"

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in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act.

Large accelerated filer    Accelerated filer    Non-accelerated filer    Smaller reporting company    Emerging growth company

If an emerging growth company, indicate by check mark if the registrant has elected not to use the extended transition period for complying with any new or revised financial accounting standards provided pursuant to Section 13(a) of the Exchange Act.

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act). Yes    No

The aggregate market value of the common equity held by non-affiliates of the registrant as of June 30, 2018 (based on the average bid and ask price of the Common Stock as quoted on the NASDAQ Global Market on June 30, 2018), was \$302,664,257.

7,483,041 shares of the registrant's common stock were outstanding as of February 22, 2019.

### **DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE**

Portions of the registrant's Proxy Statement relating to the Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held on May 21, 2019 are incorporated by reference into Part III of this Annual Report on Form 10-K where indicated.

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**CAUTIONARY NOTE REGARDING  
FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS**

This Annual Report on Form 10-K, including information included or incorporated by reference in this document, contains statements which constitute forward-looking statements within the meaning of Section 27A of the Securities Act of 1933 and Section 21E of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the "Exchange Act"). Forward-looking statements may relate to our financial condition, results of operation, plans, objectives, or future performance. These statements are based on many assumptions and estimates and are not guarantees of future performance. Our actual results may differ materially from those anticipated in any forward-looking statements, as they will depend on many factors about which we are unsure, including many factors which are beyond our control. The words "may," "would," "could," "should," "will," "expect," "anticipate," "predict," "project," "potential," "believe," "continue," "assume," "intend," "plan," and "estimate," as well as similar expressions, are meant to identify such forward-looking statements. Potential risks and uncertainties that could cause our actual results to differ from those anticipated in any forward-looking statements include, but are not limited to, those described below under Item 1A- Risk Factors and the following:

Restrictions or conditions imposed by our regulators on our operations;  
Increases in competitive pressure in the banking and financial services industries;  
Changes in access to funding or increased regulatory requirements with regard to funding;  
Changes in deposit flows;  
Credit losses as a result of declining real estate values, increasing interest rates, increasing unemployment, changes in payment behavior or other factors;  
Credit losses due to loan concentration;  
Changes in the amount of our loan portfolio collateralized by real estate and weaknesses in the real estate market;  
Our ability to successfully execute our business strategy;  
Our ability to attract and retain key personnel;  
The success and costs of our expansion into the Greensboro, North Carolina, Raleigh, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia markets;  
Changes in the interest rate environment which could reduce anticipated or actual margins;  
Changes in political conditions or the legislative or regulatory environment, including governmental initiatives affecting the financial services industry;  
Changes in economic conditions resulting in, among other things, a deterioration in credit quality;  
Changes occurring in business conditions and inflation;  
Increased cybersecurity risk, including potential business disruptions or financial losses;  
Changes in technology;  
The adequacy of the level of our allowance for loan losses and the amount of loan loss provisions required in future periods;  
Examinations by our regulatory authorities, including the possibility that the regulatory authorities may, among other things, require us to increase our allowance for loan losses or write-down assets;  
Changes in monetary and tax policies;  
The rate of delinquencies and amounts of loans charged-off;  
The rate of loan growth in recent years and the lack of seasoning of a portion of our loan portfolio;  
Our ability to maintain appropriate levels of capital and to comply with our capital ratio requirements;  
Adverse changes in asset quality and resulting credit risk-related losses and expenses;  
Changes in accounting policies and practices; and  
Other risks and uncertainties detailed in this Annual Report on Form 10-K and, from time to time, in our other filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC").

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If any of these risks or uncertainties materialize, or if any of the assumptions underlying such forward-looking statements proves to be incorrect, our results could differ materially from those expressed in, implied or projected by, such forward-looking statements. For information with respect to factors that could cause actual results to differ from the expectations stated in the forward-looking statements, see “Risk Factors” under Part I, Item 1A of this Annual Report on Form 10-K. We urge investors to consider all of these factors carefully in evaluating the forward-looking statements contained in this Annual Report on Form 10-K. We make these forward-looking as of the date of this document and we do not intend, and assume no obligation, to update the forward-looking statements or to update the reasons why actual results could differ from those expressed in, or implied or projected by, the forward-looking statements.

## **PART I**

### **Item 1. Business**

#### **General**

***Southern First Bancshares, Inc.*** (the “Company”) was incorporated in March 1999 under the laws of South Carolina and is a bank holding company registered under the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956. Our primary business is to serve as the holding company for Southern First Bank (the “Bank”), a South Carolina state bank. The Bank is a commercial bank with ten retail offices located in the Greenville, Columbia, and Charleston markets of South Carolina, two retail offices in the Raleigh and Greensboro markets of North Carolina and one retail office in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Bank is primarily engaged in the business of accepting demand deposits and savings deposits insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (the “FDIC”), and providing commercial, consumer and mortgage loans to the general public.

Unless the context requires otherwise, references to the “Company,” “we,” “us,” “our,” or similar references mean Southern First Bancshares, Inc. and its subsidiaries.

#### **Our Competitive Strengths**

We believe that the following business strengths have been instrumental to the success of our core operations. These attributes will enable us to continue profitable growth, while remaining fundamentally sound and driving value to our shareholders.

***Simple and Efficient ClientFIRST Model.*** We operate our Bank using a simple and efficient style of banking that is focused on providing core banking products and services to our clients through a team of talented and experienced bankers. We refer to this model as “ClientFIRST” and it is structured to deliver superior client service via “relationship teams,” which provide each client with a specific banker contact and a consistent support team responsible for all of the client’s banking needs. We believe this model results in a consistent and superior level of professional service that provides us with a distinct competitive advantage by enabling us to build and maintain long-term relationships with desirable clients, enhancing the quality and stability of our funding and lending operations and positioning us to take advantage of future growth opportunities in our existing markets. We also believe that this client focused culture has led to our successful expansion into new markets in the past, and will enable us to be successful if we seek to expand into new markets in the future.

Our ClientFIRST model focuses on achieving cost efficiencies by diligently managing the growth of our number of employees and banking offices. We have historically insisted that the identification of talented bankers drives our growth strategy, as opposed to a more general desire to enter a specific geography or market. This strategy translates into a smaller number of brick and mortar offices relative to our size and compared to peer banks, but larger overall deposit balances in our offices as compared to peers. As a result, our offices average approximately \$121 million in total deposits. We believe this style of banking allows us to deliver exceptional client service, while achieving lower efficiency ratios relative to our local competitors, as evidenced by our 56.5% efficiency ratio for the year ended December 31, 2018.

We continue to make significant investments in our IT systems and technology offerings to our clients that we believe will continue to drive low-cost deposit growth. We believe that our current mobile banking, on-line banking and cash management offerings are industry-leading solutions amongst community banks, and we will continue to invest in the latest technology solutions to ensure we meet the evolving needs of our clients and maintain this competitive advantage over other community banks.

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**Attractive South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia Markets.** We have ten banking offices located in Greenville, Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina, which are the three largest markets in South Carolina, two banking offices located in Raleigh and Greensboro, North Carolina, which are the second and third largest markets in North Carolina, respectively, and one banking office located in Atlanta, Georgia, which is the largest market in Georgia. The following table illustrates our market share, by insured deposits as of the dates indicated, in these five markets:

Market <sup>(1)</sup>	Total Offices	Our Market Deposits	
		June 30, 2018	Total Market Deposits <sup>(2)</sup>
			(Dollars in thousands)
Greenville	4	\$ 838,775	\$ 16,978,025
Columbia	3	326,557	19,532,799
Charleston	3	351,470	13,918,513
Raleigh	1	46,713	27,489,640
Greensboro	1	N/A	12,094,571
Atlanta	1	14,396	173,054,575

(1) Represents the metropolitan statistical area ("MSA") for each market.

(2) The total market deposits data displayed are as of June 30, 2018 as reported by the FDIC.

**Greenville.** The city of Greenville is located in Greenville County, South Carolina approximately midway between Atlanta and Charlotte on the heavily traveled I-85 business corridor. The Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin MSA is the most populous market in South Carolina with an estimated 895,923 residents as reported in March 2018. The median household income for the Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin MSA was \$51,154 for 2018. A large and diverse metropolitan area, the Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin MSA is one of the southeast region's premier areas for business, serving as headquarters for Michelin and Hubbell Lighting as well as hosting significant operations for BMW and Lockheed Martin.

**Columbia.** The city of Columbia is located in Richland County, South Carolina and its surrounding suburban areas expand into adjoining Lexington County. Columbia is the state capital, the largest city in the state and the home of the University of South Carolina and Fort Jackson, the Army's largest Initial Entry Training Center. The Columbia MSA is the second most populous market in the state with an estimated population of 825,033 residents as reported in March 2018. The median household income for the Columbia MSA was \$54,480 for 2018.

**Charleston.** The city of Charleston is located in Charleston County, South Carolina. The Charleston-North Charleston MSA is the third most populous market in the state with an estimated population of 775,831 residents as reported in March 2018. Charleston is home to the deepest port in the Southeast and boasts top companies in the aerospace, biomedical and technology fields such as Boeing, the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) and Blackbaud. The median household income for the Charleston-North Charleston MSA was approximately \$60,546 for 2018. One of our retail offices in the Charleston market is located in the city of Mount Pleasant, which is located just north of Charleston in Charleston County and ranks as the fourth largest city in South Carolina.

**Raleigh.** The city of Raleigh is the second largest city in the state and is located in Wake County, North Carolina. The Raleigh MSA is one of the most populous markets in the state of North Carolina with an estimated population of 1.34 million residents as reported in March 2018. Raleigh is the state capital and is home to North Carolina State University and is part of the Research Triangle area, together with Durham, North Carolina (home of Duke University) and Chapel Hill, North Carolina (home of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). The median household income for the Raleigh MSA was approximately \$72,576 for 2018. We opened our first retail office in Raleigh in January 2017.

**Greensboro.** The city of Greensboro is the third largest city in North Carolina and is located in Guilford County. The Greensboro-High Point MSA has an estimated population of 761,184 residents as reported in March 2018. Greensboro has traditionally been a fixture in the textiles, tobacco and furniture industries while also moving towards an increased presence of high-tech, aviation and transportation/logistics sectors. Greensboro, along with Winston-Salem and High Point, is commonly referred to as the Triad region of North Carolina and is home to companies such as Honda Aircraft, Lincoln Financial Group and Volvo Trucks of North America. The median household income for the Greensboro MSA was approximately \$50,285 for 2018. We opened our first retail office in Greensboro in April 2018.

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*Atlanta.* The Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell MSA has the ninth largest population in the U.S. with 5.88 million residents as reported in March 2018. Atlanta is the state capital of, and largest city in, Georgia and is the world headquarters of corporations such as Coca-Cola, Home Depot, UPS, Delta Airlines and Turner Broadcasting. The median household income for the Atlanta MSA is \$65,381 for 2018. We opened our first retail office in Atlanta in August 2017.

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We believe that the demographics and growth characteristics of these six markets will provide us with significant opportunities to further develop existing client relationships and expand our client base.

***Experienced Management Team, Dedicated Board of Directors and Talented Employees.*** Our senior management team is led by R. Arthur Seaver, Jr., F. Justin Strickland, and Michael D. Dowling, whose biographies are included below. These executives lead a team of 34 additional senior team members which we believe compares favorably to any community bank management team assembled in South Carolina.

*R. Arthur "Art" Seaver, Jr.* has served as the Chief Executive Officer of our Company and our Bank since 1999. He has over 30 years of banking experience. From 1986 until 1992, Mr. Seaver held various positions with The Citizens & Southern National Bank of South Carolina. From 1992 until February 1999, he was with Greenville National Bank, which was acquired by Regions Bank in 1998. He was the Senior Vice President in lending and was also responsible for managing Greenville National Bank's deposit strategies prior to leaving to form the Bank. Mr. Seaver is a 1986 graduate of Clemson University with a bachelor's degree in Financial Management and a 1999 graduate of the BAI Graduate School of Community Bank Management.

*F. Justin Strickland* has served as President of our Company and our Bank since 2006. He has over 30 years of banking experience. From 1985 until 1993, Mr. Strickland held various positions with The Citizens & Southern National Bank of South Carolina. From 1993 until November 2006, he was with Carolina First Bank. From 1999 until November 2006, he held the position of South Carolina Midlands Market President. Mr. Strickland is a 1985 graduate of the University of South Carolina with a bachelor's degree in Finance and the LSU Graduate School of Banking of the South in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1996.

*Michael D. Dowling* has served as an Executive Vice President and the Chief Financial Officer of our Company and our Bank since 2011. He has over 24 years of experience in the banking industry. Mr. Dowling was previously employed with KPMG LLP from 1994 until 2011, including most recently as an Audit Partner (2005-2011) and a member of KPMG's Financial Services practice. Mr. Dowling has extensive experience working with public companies and financial institutions. He is a 1993 graduate of Clemson University, with a degree in Accounting and is a CPA in South Carolina and North Carolina.

In addition to Messrs. Seaver, Strickland and Dowling, our executive management team consists of 11 individuals who bring an average of 25 years of experience in the banking industry.

The management team is complemented by a dedicated board of directors with extensive local market knowledge and a wide range of experience including accounting, business, banking, manufacturing, insurance, management and finance. We believe that our management's and board's incentives are closely aligned with our shareholders through the ownership of a substantial amount of our stock. As of December 31, 2018, our executive officers and board of directors owned an aggregate of 833,058 shares of our common stock, including options to purchase shares of our common stock, which represented approximately 11.16% of the fully-diluted amount of our common stock outstanding. We believe that our officers' and directors' experience and local market knowledge are valuable assets and will enable them to guide us successfully in the future.

In addition, we believe that we have assembled a group of highly talented employees by being an employer of choice in the markets we serve. We employed a total of 229 full-time equivalent employees as of December 31, 2018. Our employees are skilled in the areas of banking, information technology, management, sales, advertising and marketing, among others. We strive to provide an "umbrella for great talent," characterized by a culture of transparency and collaboration which permeates all levels of the organization. To drive our culture of transparency and collaboration, our employees engage in a series of weekly meetings to understand the goals and plan for each week. These meetings are intended to remind our employees of our vision, strategy and ClientFIRST service, and provide our employees with information regarding monthly and quarterly goals and client or prospect needs. In addition, each week is started with a meeting of all Senior and Executive Vice Presidents to ensure that all team members are informed on the latest developments of our Company. Our employees and their ClientFIRST approach to service have been instrumental to our success.

## **Our Business Strategy**

We are focused on growing business relationships and building core deposits, profitable loans and noninterest income. We believe that we have built a dynamic franchise that meets the financial needs of our clients by providing an array of personalized products and services delivered by seasoned banking professionals with knowledge of our local markets. Our overall strategic goal is to provide the highest level of service to our clients while achieving high-performance metrics within the community banking market that drive franchise and shareholder value. Our specific business strategies include:





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**Focus on Profitable and Efficient Growth.** Our executive management team and board of directors are dedicated to producing profits and returns for our shareholders. We actively manage the mix of assets and liabilities on our balance sheet to optimize our net interest margin while also maintaining expense controls and developing noninterest income streams. By constantly striving to build a well-structured balance sheet, we seek to increase profitability and improve our return on average assets, return on average equity and efficiency ratio. We believe that, as the economy continues to improve, our focus on maximizing our net interest margin and minimizing our efficiency ratio while maintaining credit quality controls will translate into continued and improved profitability and shareholder returns. We are committed to enhancing these levels of profitability by focusing on our core competencies of commercial lending and core deposit gathering. We believe that we have the infrastructure currently in place, such as technology, support staff and administration, to support expansion with limited associated noninterest expense increases.

**Provide a Distinctive Client Experience.** Our markets have been subject to consolidation of local community banks primarily by larger, out-of-state financial institutions. We believe there is a large client base in our markets that prefers doing business with a local institution and may be dissatisfied with the service offered by national and larger regional banks. We believe that the exceptional level of professional service provided to our clients as a result of our ClientFIRST model provides us with a distinct competitive advantage over our local competitors. We also believe that technology innovation will continue to play a critical role in retaining clients and winning new business. We believe that our current mobile banking, on-line banking and cash management offerings are industry-leading solutions amongst community banks. During 2018, 75% of deposits were acquired through our office network, 22% came through the commercial remote deposit capture channel and the remaining 3% came through consumer mobile deposits. We believe that the volume in remote deposit capture and mobile deposit channels will continue to increase over time as more clients become acquainted with the convenience these services provide. By delivering superior professional service through our ClientFIRST model, coupled with our deep understanding of our markets and our commitment to providing the latest technology solutions to meet our clients' banking needs, we believe that we can attract new clients and expand our total loans and deposits.

**Maintain a Rigorous Risk Management Infrastructure.** As we grow, one of our top priorities is to continue to build a robust enterprise risk management infrastructure. We believe effective risk management requires a culture of risk management and governance throughout the Company. The legislative and regulatory landscape continues to quickly evolve, so we are continually performing risk assessments throughout the organization and re-allocating resources where appropriate. We will continue to add new resources and technology investments to help enhance all of our risk management processes throughout the Bank. Our risk management success is exemplified by our historic credit risk management and disciplined underwriting practices, which have enabled us to successfully grow our balance sheet while maintaining strong credit quality metrics. We do not reduce our credit standards or pricing discipline to generate new loans. In addition, we are heavily focused on compliance risk and cybersecurity risk, as both of these risks have increased since our inception. Our management team continually analyzes emerging fraud and security risks and utilizes tools, strategies and policies to manage risk while delivering an optimal and appropriate client experience. We believe our risk management structure allows our board and senior management to maintain effective oversight of our risks to ensure that our personnel are following prudent and appropriate risk management practices resulting in strong loan quality and minimal loan losses.

**Attract Talented Banking Professionals With A "ClientFIRST" Focus.** We believe that our ability to attract and retain banking professionals with strong community relationships and significant knowledge of our markets will continue to drive our success and grow our business in an efficient manner. By focusing on experienced, established bankers who deliver exceptional client service through our ClientFIRST model, we believe we can enhance our market position and add profitable growth opportunities. We believe that the strength of our exceptional client service and relationship banking approach will continue to help us attract these established bankers. In recent years, we have invested in our internal infrastructure, including support and back office personnel, and we believe that we can continue to add experienced frontline bankers to our existing markets, which will drive our efficient growth.

We will continue to expand our franchise, but only in a controlled manner. We may choose to open new locations, but only after rigorous due diligence and substantial quantitative analysis regarding the financial and capital impacts of such investments. We may also choose to enter new metropolitan markets contiguous to, or nearby, our current South Carolina footprint, such as our recently opened expansions in Raleigh and Greensboro, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia, but only after careful study and the identification and vetting of a local, senior level banking team with significant experience and reputational strength in that market. We have not yet supplemented our historic strategy of organic deposit and loan growth with traditional mergers or acquisitions. We evaluate potential acquisition opportunities that we believe would be complementary to our business as part of our growth strategy. However, we have not yet identified any specific acquisition opportunity that meets our strict requirements and do not have any immediate plans, arrangements or understandings relating to any acquisition. Furthermore, we do not believe an acquisition is necessary to successfully drive our growth and execute our ClientFIRST model.



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### **Lending Activities**

*General.* We emphasize a range of lending services, including real estate, commercial, and equity-line consumer loans to individuals and small- to medium-sized businesses and professional firms that are located in or conduct a substantial portion of their business in our market area. Our underwriting standards vary for each type of loan, as described below. Because loans typically provide higher interest yields than other types of interest-earning assets, we invest a substantial percentage of our earning assets in our loan portfolio. At December 31, 2018, we had net loans of \$1.66 billion, representing 87.4% of our total assets.

We have focused our lending activities primarily on the professional markets in Greenville, Columbia, Charleston, Raleigh, Greensboro and Atlanta including doctors, dentists, and small business owners. By focusing on this client base and by serving each client with a consistent relationship team of bankers, we have generated a loan portfolio with larger average loan amounts than we believe is typical for a community bank. As of December 31, 2018, our average loan size was approximately \$235,000. Excluding home equity lines of credit, the average loan size was approximately \$286,000. At the same time, we have strived to maintain a diversified loan portfolio and limit the amount of our loans to any single client. As of December 31, 2018, our 10 largest client loan relationships represented approximately \$181.7 million, or 10.8%, of our loan portfolio.

*Loan Approval.* Certain credit risks are inherent in making loans. These include prepayment risks, risks resulting from uncertainties in the future value of collateral, risks resulting from changes in economic and industry conditions, and risks inherent in dealing with individual borrowers. We attempt to mitigate repayment risks by adhering to internal credit policies and procedures. These policies and procedures include officer and client lending limits, a multi-layered approval process for larger loans, documentation examination, and follow-up procedures for any exceptions to credit policies. Our loan approval policies provide for various levels of officer lending authority. When the amount of aggregate loans to a single borrower exceeds an individual officer's lending authority, the loan request will be considered for approval by a team of officers led by a senior lender, or by the voting members of the officers' loan committee, based on the loan amount. The officers' loan committee, which is comprised of a group of our senior commercial lenders, bank president, and chief executive officer, has pre-determined lending limits, and any loans in excess of this lending limit will be submitted for approval by the finance committee of our board or by the full board. We do not make any loans to any director or executive officer of the Bank unless the loan is approved by the board of directors of the Bank and all loans to directors, officers and employees are on terms not more favorable to such person than would be available to a person not affiliated with the Bank, consistent with federal banking regulations.

Management monitors exposure to credit risk from potential concentrations of loans to particular borrowers or groups of borrowers, industries and geographic regions, as well as concentrations of lending products and practices such as loans that subject borrowers to substantial payment increases (e.g. principal deferral periods, loans with initial interest-only periods, etc.), and loans with high loan-to-value ratios. These types of loans are subject to strict underwriting standards and are more closely monitored than a loan with a low loan-to-value ratio. Furthermore, there are industry practices that could subject the Company to increased credit risk should economic conditions change over the course of a loan's life. For example, the Company makes variable rate loans and fixed rate principal-amortizing loans with maturities prior to the loan being fully paid (i.e. balloon payment loans). The various types of loans are individually underwritten and monitored to manage the associated risks.

*Credit Administration and Loan Review.* We maintain a continuous loan review system. We also apply a credit grading system to each loan, and we use an independent process to review the loan files on a test basis to assess the grading of each loan. The Bank periodically reviews performance benchmarks established by management in the areas of nonperforming assets, charge-offs, past dues, and loan documentation. Each loan officer is responsible for each loan he or she makes, regardless of whether other individuals or committees joined in the approval. This responsibility continues until the loan is repaid or until the loan is officially assigned to another officer.

*Lending Limits.* Our lending activities are subject to a variety of lending limits imposed by federal and state laws and regulations. In general, the Bank is subject to a legal limit on loans to a single borrower equal to 15% of the Bank's capital and unimpaired surplus. Based upon the capitalization of the Bank at December 31, 2018, the maximum amount we could lend to one borrower is \$29.7 million. However, to mitigate concentration risk, our internal lending limit at December 31, 2018 is \$20.8 million and may vary based on our assessment of the lending relationship. The board of directors will adjust the internal lending limit as deemed necessary to continue to mitigate risk and serve the Bank's clients. The Bank's legal lending limit will increase or decrease in response to increases or decreases in the Bank's level of capital. We are able to sell participations in our larger loans to other financial institutions, which allow us to manage the risk involved in these loans and to meet the lending needs of our clients requiring extensions of credit in excess of these limits.

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*Loan Portfolio Segments.* Our loan portfolio is comprised of commercial and consumer loans made to small businesses and individuals for various business and personal purposes. While our loan portfolio is not concentrated in loans to any single borrower or a relatively small number of borrowers, the principal component of our loan portfolio is loans secured by real estate mortgages on either commercial or residential property. These loans will generally fall into one of the following six categories: commercial owner occupied real estate, commercial non-owner occupied real estate, commercial construction, consumer real estate, consumer construction, and home equity loans. We obtain a security interest in real estate whenever possible, in addition to any other available collateral, in order to increase the likelihood of the ultimate repayment of the loan. At December 31, 2018, loans secured by first or second mortgages on commercial and consumer real estate made up approximately 82.3% of our loan portfolio. In addition to loans secured by real estate, our loan portfolio includes commercial business loans and other consumer loans which comprised 16.3% and 1.4%, respectively, of our total loan portfolio at December 31, 2018.

Interest rates for all real estate loan categories may be fixed or adjustable, and will more likely be fixed for shorter-term loans. We generally charge an origination fee for each loan which is taken into income over the life of the loan as an adjustment to the loan yield. Other loan fees consist primarily of late charge fees. Real estate loans are subject to the same general risks as other loans and are particularly sensitive to fluctuations in the value of real estate. Fluctuations in the value of real estate, as well as other factors arising after a loan has been made, could negatively affect a borrower's cash flow, creditworthiness, and ability to repay the loan. Although, the loans are collateralized by real estate, the primary source of repayment may not be the sale of real estate.

The following describes the types of loans in our loan portfolio.

*Commercial Real Estate Loans (Commercial Owner Occupied and Commercial Non-owner Occupied Real Estate Loans).* At December 31, 2018, commercial owner occupied and non-owner occupied real estate loans (other than construction loans) amounted to \$771.3 million, or approximately 46.0% of our loan portfolio. Of our commercial real estate loan portfolio, \$404.3 million in loans were non-owner occupied properties, representing 35.8% of our commercial real estate portfolio and 24.1% of our total loan portfolio. The remainder of our commercial real estate loan portfolio, \$367.0 million in loans or 32.5% of the commercial loan portfolio, were owner occupied. Owner occupied loans represented 21.9% of our total loan portfolio. At December 31, 2018, our individual commercial real estate loans ranged in size from approximately \$10,000 to \$18.7 million, with an average loan size of approximately \$644,000. These loans generally have terms of five years or less, although payments may be structured on a longer amortization basis. We evaluate each borrower on an individual basis and attempt to determine the business risks and credit profile of each borrower. We attempt to reduce credit risk in the commercial real estate portfolio by emphasizing loans on owner-occupied office and retail buildings where the loan-to-value ratio, established by independent appraisals, does not exceed 85%. We also generally require that a borrower's cash flow exceeds 115% of monthly debt service obligations. In order to ensure secondary sources of payment and liquidity to support a loan request, we typically review all of the personal financial statements of the principal owners and require their personal guarantees.

*Construction Real Estate Loans.* We offer adjustable and fixed rate construction real estate loans for commercial and consumer projects, typically to builders and developers and to consumers who wish to build their own homes. At December 31, 2018, total commercial and consumer construction loans amounted to \$122.3 million, or 7.3% of our loan portfolio. Commercial construction loans represented \$84.4 million, or 5.0%, of our total loan portfolio, while consumer construction loans represented \$37.9 million, or 2.3% of our total loan portfolio. At December 31, 2018, our commercial construction real estate loans ranged in size from approximately \$40,000 to \$10.4 million, with an average loan balance of approximately \$1.2 million. At December 31, 2018, our consumer or residential construction loans ranged in size from approximately \$10,000 to \$3.0 million, with an average loan size of approximately \$340,000. The duration of our construction loans generally is limited to 18 months, although payments may be structured on a longer amortization basis. Commercial construction loans generally carry a higher degree of risk than long-term financing of existing properties because repayment depends on the ultimate completion of the project and sometimes on the sale of the property. Specific risks include:

- cost overruns;
- mismanaged construction;
- inferior or improper construction techniques;
- economic changes or downturns during construction;
- a downturn in the real estate market;
- rising interest rates which may prevent sale of the property; and
- failure to sell completed projects in a timely manner.

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We attempt to reduce the risk associated with construction loans by obtaining personal guarantees where possible and by keeping the loan-to-value ratio of the completed project at or below 80%.

*Commercial Business Loans.* We make loans for commercial purposes in various lines of businesses, including the manufacturing, service industry, and professional service areas. At December 31, 2018, commercial business loans amounted to \$273.0 million, or 16.3% of our loan portfolio, and ranged in size from approximately \$5,000 to \$13.9 million, with an average loan size of approximately \$193,000. Commercial loans are generally considered to have greater risk than first or second mortgages on real estate because commercial loans may be unsecured, or if they are secured, the value of the collateral may be difficult to assess and more likely to decrease than real estate.

We are eligible to offer small business loans utilizing government enhancements such as the Small Business Administration's ("SBA") 7(a) program and SBA's 504 programs. These loans typically are partially guaranteed by the government, which helps to reduce their risk. Government guarantees of SBA loans do not exceed, and are generally less than, 80% of the loan. As of December 31, 2018, we had originated one loan utilizing government enhancements.

*Consumer Real Estate Loans and Home Equity Loans.* At December 31, 2018 consumer real estate loans (other than construction loans) amounted to \$486.9 million, or 29.0% of our loan portfolio. Included in the consumer real estate loans was \$320.9 million, or 19.1% of our loan portfolio, in first and second mortgages on individuals' homes, while home equity loans represented \$165.9 million, or 9.9% of our total loan portfolio. At December 31, 2018, our individual residential real estate loans ranged in size from \$10,000 to \$6.1 million, with an average loan size of approximately \$377,000. Generally, we limit the loan-to-value ratio on our consumer real estate loans to 85%. We offer fixed and adjustable rate consumer real estate loans with terms of up to 30 years. We typically offer these long-term fixed rate loans through a third party rather than originating and retaining these loans ourselves. Consumer real estate and home equity loans that we retain on our balance sheet typically have terms of 10 years or less. We also offer home equity lines of credit. At December 31, 2018, our individual home equity lines of credit ranged in size from \$5,000 to \$1.9 million, with an average of approximately \$109,000. Our underwriting criteria and the risks associated with home equity loans and lines of credit are generally the same as those for first mortgage loans. Home equity lines of credit typically have terms of ten years or less. We generally limit the extension of credit to 90% of the market value of each property, although we may extend up to 100% of the market value.

*Other Consumer Loans.* We make a variety of loans to individuals for personal and household purposes, including secured and unsecured installment loans and revolving lines of credit. These consumer loans are underwritten based on the borrower's income, current debt level, past credit history, and the availability and value of collateral. Consumer rates are both fixed and variable, with negotiable terms. At December 31, 2018, consumer loans other than real estate amounted to \$23.8 million, or 1.4% of our loan portfolio, and ranged in size from \$5,000 to \$2.2 million, with an average loan size of approximately \$14,000. Our installment loans typically amortize over periods up to 60 months. We will offer consumer loans with a single maturity date when a specific source of repayment is available. We typically require monthly payments of interest and a portion of the principal on our revolving loan products. Consumer loans are generally considered to have greater risk than first or second mortgages on real estate because they may be unsecured, or, if they are secured, the value of the collateral may be difficult to assess and more likely to decrease in value than real estate.

## **Deposit Services**

Our principal source of funds is core deposits. We offer a full range of deposit services, including checking accounts, commercial checking accounts, savings accounts, and other time deposits of various types, ranging from daily money market accounts to long-term certificates of deposit. Our out-of-market, or wholesale, certificates of deposits represented \$79.3 million, or 4.8%, of total deposits at December 31, 2018. In an effort to obtain lower costing deposits, we have focused on expanding our retail deposit program. We currently have 13 retail offices which assist us in obtaining low cost transaction accounts that are less affected by rising rates. Deposit rates are reviewed regularly by senior management of the Bank. We believe that the rates we offer are competitive with those offered by other financial institutions in our area. We focus on client service and our ClientFIRST culture to attract and retain deposits.

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### **Other Banking Services**

In addition to deposit and loan services, we offer other bank services such as internet banking, cash management, safe deposit boxes, direct deposit, automatic drafts, bill payment and mobile banking services. We earn fees for most of these services, including debit and credit card transactions, sales of checks, and wire transfers. We also receive ATM transaction fees from transactions performed by our clients. We are associated with the NYCE, Pulse, STAR, and Cirrus networks, which are available to our clients throughout the country. Since we outsource our ATM services, we are charged related transaction fees from our ATM service provider. We have contracted with Fidelity National Information Systems, an outside computer service company, to provide our core data processing services and our ATM processing. By outsourcing these services, we believe we are able to reduce our overhead by matching the expense in each period to the transaction volume that occurs during the period, as a significant portion of the fee charged is directly related to the number of loan and deposit accounts and the related number of transactions we have during the period. We believe that by being associated with a shared network of ATMs, we are better able to serve our clients and are able to attract clients who are accustomed to the convenience of using ATMs, although we do not believe that maintaining this association is critical to our success. We also offer Internet banking services, bill payment services, and cash management and mobile banking services.

### **Competition**

The banking business is highly competitive, and we experience competition in our market from many other financial institutions. Competition among financial institutions is based upon interest rates offered on deposit accounts, interest rates charged on loans, other credit and service charges relating to loans, the quality and scope of the services rendered, the convenience of banking facilities, and, in the case of loans to commercial borrowers, relative lending limits. We compete with commercial banks, credit unions, savings and loan associations, mortgage banking firms, consumer finance companies, securities brokerage firms, insurance companies, money market funds, and other mutual funds, as well as other super-regional, national, and international financial institutions that operate offices in Greenville, Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina; Raleigh and Greensboro, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia and elsewhere.

As of June 30, 2018, the most recent date for which market data is available, there were 31 financial institutions in our primary market of Greenville County, 17 financial institutions in the Columbia market, 27 financial institutions in the Charleston market, 32 financial institutions in the Raleigh market, 17 financial institutions in the Greensboro market and 48 financial institutions in the Atlanta market. We compete with other financial institutions in our market areas both in attracting deposits and in making loans. In addition, we have to attract our client base from other existing financial institutions and from new residents. Many of our competitors are well-established, larger financial institutions with substantially greater resources and lending limits, such as BB&T, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and SunTrust. These institutions offer some services, such as extensive and established branch networks and trust services that we do not provide. In addition, many of our non-bank competitors are not subject to the same extensive federal regulations that govern bank holding companies and federally insured banks. Because larger competitors have advantages in attracting business from larger corporations, we do not generally compete for that business. Instead, we concentrate our efforts on attracting the business of individuals and small and medium-size businesses. With regard to such accounts, we generally compete on the basis of client service and responsiveness to client needs, the convenience of our offices and hours, and the availability and pricing of our products and services.

We believe our commitment to quality and personalized banking services through our ClientFIRST culture is a factor that contributes to our competitiveness and success.

### **Employees**

At December 31, 2018, we employed a total of 229 full-time equivalent employees. We provide our full-term employees and certain part-time employees with a comprehensive program of benefits, including medical benefits, life insurance, long-term disability coverage and a 401(k) plan. Our employees are not represented by a collective bargaining agreement. Management considers its employee relations to be excellent.

### **Available Information**

We file Annual Reports on Form 10-K, Quarterly Reports on Form 10-Q, and Current Reports on Form 8-K with the SEC which are accessible electronically at the SEC's website at [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov). We maintain an Internet website at [www.southernfirst.com](http://www.southernfirst.com) where these reports can also be accessed.





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### **SUPERVISION AND REGULATION**

Both the Company and the Bank are subject to extensive state and federal banking laws and regulations that impose specific requirements or restrictions on and provide for general regulatory oversight of virtually all aspects of our operations. These laws and regulations are generally intended to protect depositors, not shareholders. Changes in applicable laws or regulations may have a material effect on our business and prospects.

The following discussion is not intended to be a complete list of all the activities regulated by the banking laws or of the impact of such laws and regulations on our operations. It is intended only to briefly summarize some material provisions. The following summary is qualified by reference to the statutory and regulatory provisions discussed.

#### **Recent Legislative and Regulatory Developments**

Although the financial crisis has now passed, two legislative and regulatory responses – the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (the “Dodd-Frank Act”) and the Basel III-based capital rules – will continue to have an impact on our operations.

##### *The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act*

The Dodd-Frank Act was signed into law in July 2010 and impacts financial institutions in numerous ways, including:

- The creation of a Financial Stability Oversight Council responsible for monitoring and managing systemic risk,
- Granting additional authority to the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve (the “Federal Reserve”) to regulate certain types of nonbank financial companies,
- Granting new authority to the FDIC as liquidator and receiver,
- Changing the manner in which deposit insurance assessments are made,
- Requiring regulators to modify capital standards,
- Establishing the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (the “CFPB”),
- Capping interchange fees that banks charge merchants for debit card transactions,
- Imposing more stringent requirements on mortgage lenders, and
- Limiting banks’ proprietary trading activities.

There are many provisions in the Dodd-Frank Act mandating regulators to adopt new regulations and conduct studies upon which future regulation may be based. While some have been issued, many remain to be issued. Governmental intervention and new regulations could materially and adversely affect our business, financial condition and results of operations.

##### *The Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act*

On May 24, 2018, President Trump signed into law the first major financial services reform bill since the enactment of the Dodd-Frank Act. The Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act (the “Reform Law”) modifies or eliminates certain requirements on community and regional banks and nonbank financial institutions. The Reform Law contains several important provisions, including:

- Exempting banks with less than \$10 billion in total consolidated assets from the Volcker Rule and easing certain naming restrictions; and
- Reducing reporting and supervision requirements applicable to community banks.

Section 201 of the Reform Law simplifies applicable leverage capital requirements and risk-based capital requirements for banks with total consolidated assets of less than \$10 billion. The Reform Law requires the federal banking agencies to establish, through notice and comment rulemaking, a “Community Bank Leverage Ratio” (i.e., a ratio of tangible equity capital to average total consolidated assets, as reported on the bank’s regulatory filing with the appropriate federal banking agency) of between eight and ten percent. The federal banking agencies must also establish procedures for the treatment of banks that fall below the Community Bank Leverage Ratio percentage after having previously exceeded it. Banks that exceed the Community Bank Leverage Ratio will be considered to have met the generally applicable leverage capital and the generally applicable risk-based capital requirements of the federal banking agency, as well as, the capital ratio requirements that are required to be considered “well-capitalized” under Section 38 of the FDIA.

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Section 203 of the Reform Law excludes banks that have less than \$10 billion in total consolidated assets and total trading assets and trading liabilities of less than five percent of total consolidated assets from Section 619 of the Dodd-Frank Act, known as the "Volcker Rule", which prohibits "proprietary trading" and the ownership or sponsorship of private equity or hedge funds that are referred to as "covered funds".

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The Reform Law also reduces reporting requirements under the FDIA for banks that (i) have less than \$5 billion in total consolidated assets; and (ii) satisfy such other criteria as the federal banking agencies deem appropriate. Section 205 of the Reform Law requires the federal banking agencies to issue regulations to allow for a reduced reporting requirement for a bank filing the first and third quarterly reports of condition (i.e., call reports) required under Section 7(a) of the FDIA. The Reform Law leaves discretion to the federal banking agencies to determine what constitutes “reduced” reporting requirements. In January 2019, the federal banking agencies were accepting comments on a proposed rule to reduce reporting requirements for certain banks.

The Federal Reserve is required under Section 207 to increase the size of bank holding companies from \$1 billion to \$3 billion in total consolidated assets that are able to utilize acquisition debt financing under the “Small Bank Holding Company and Savings and Loan Holding Company Policy Statement” for purposes of applications under the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956. In August 2018, the Federal Reserve completed this task through an interim final rule.

Banks with up to \$3 billion in total consolidated assets will be permitted to be examined by their federal banking regulator every 18 months (as opposed to every 12 months). The Reform Law does not otherwise alter the FDIA requirements that in order to be subject to the 18-month periodic review, the bank must be well capitalized and found to be well managed after its most recent examination, with a composite condition of outstanding. The bank must also not be subject to an enforcement action and no person shall have acquired control of the bank in the previous 12-month period. In August 2018, the federal banking agencies adopted an interim final rule to implement this change.

The ultimate impact of certain sections of the Reform Act remain to be seen as it still requires action by federal banking agencies through the rulemaking process.

### *Basel Capital Standards*

Regulatory capital rules released in July 2013 to implement capital standards referred to as Basel III and developed by an international body known as the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, impose higher minimum capital requirements for bank holding companies and banks than those previously in place. The rules apply to all national and state banks and savings associations regardless of size and bank holding companies and savings and loan holding companies with more than \$1 billion in total consolidated assets. More stringent requirements are imposed on “advanced approaches” banking organizations—those organizations with \$250 billion or more in total consolidated assets, \$10 billion or more in total foreign exposures, or that have opted in to the Basel II capital regime. The requirements in the rules as applicable to us began to phase in on January 1, 2015 and were fully phased in on January 1, 2019.

The rules include certain higher risk-based capital and leverage requirements than those previously in place. Specifically, the following minimum capital requirements apply to us:

- a new common equity Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 4.5%;
- a Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 6% (increased from the former 4% requirement);
- a total risk-based capital ratio of 8% (unchanged from the former requirement); and
- a leverage ratio of 4% (also unchanged from the former requirement).

Under the rule, Tier 1 capital is redefined to include two components: Common Equity Tier 1 capital and additional Tier 1 capital. The new and highest form of capital, Common Equity Tier 1 capital, consists solely of common stock (plus related surplus), retained earnings, accumulated other comprehensive income, and limited amounts of minority interests that are in the form of common stock. Additional Tier 1 capital includes other perpetual instruments historically included in Tier 1 capital, such as noncumulative perpetual preferred stock. Tier 2 capital consists of instruments that currently qualify in Tier 2 capital plus instruments that the rule has disqualified from Tier 1 capital treatment. Cumulative perpetual preferred stock, formerly includable in Tier 1 capital, is now included only in Tier 2 capital. Accumulated other comprehensive income (AOCI) is presumptively included in Common Equity Tier 1 capital and often would operate to reduce this category of capital. The rule provided a one-time opportunity at the end of the first quarter of 2015 for covered banking organizations to opt out of much of this treatment of AOCI. We made this opt-out election and, as a result, will retain the pre-existing treatment for AOCI.

In addition, in order to avoid restrictions on capital distributions or discretionary bonus payments to executives, a covered banking organization must maintain a “capital conservation buffer” on top of its minimum risk-based capital requirements. This buffer must consist solely of Tier 1 Common Equity, but the buffer applies to all three measurements (Common Equity Tier 1, Tier 1 capital and total capital). The 2.5% capital conservation buffer was phased in incrementally over time, becoming fully effective on January 1, 2019, resulting in the following effective minimum capital plus capital conservation buffer ratios: (i) a Common Equity Tier 1 capital ratio of 7.0%; (ii) a Tier 1 capital ratio of 8.5%, and (iii) a total capital ratio of 10.5%.



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In general, the rules have had the effect of increasing capital requirements by increasing the risk weights on certain assets, including high volatility commercial real estate, certain loans past due 90 days or more or in nonaccrual status, mortgage servicing rights not includable in Common Equity Tier 1 capital, equity exposures, and claims on securities firms, that are used in the denominator of the three risk-based capital ratios.

It is management's belief that, as of December 31, 2018, the Company and the Bank would have met all capital adequacy requirements under Basel III on a fully phased-in basis if such requirements were currently effective.

### *Volcker Rule*

Section 619 of the Dodd-Frank Act, known as the "Volcker Rule," prohibits any bank, bank holding company, or affiliate (referred to collectively as "banking entities") from engaging in two types of activities: "proprietary trading" and the ownership or sponsorship of private equity or hedge funds that are referred to as "covered funds." Proprietary trading is, in general, trading in securities on a short-term basis for a banking entity's own account. Funds subject to the ownership and sponsorship prohibition are those not required to register with the SEC because they have only accredited investors or no more than 100 investors. In December 2013, our primary federal regulators, the Federal Reserve and the FDIC, together with other federal banking agencies, the SEC and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, finalized a regulation to implement the Volcker Rule. At December 31, 2018, the Company has evaluated our securities portfolio and has determined that we do not hold any covered funds. As a result of the Reform Law, after implementation of the rulemaking process by the federal banking agencies, we expect to no longer be subject to the Volcker Rule.

### *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*

On December 22, 2017, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (the "Tax Act") was signed into law. The Tax Act includes a number of provisions that impact us, including the following:

**Tax Rate.** The Tax Act replaced the graduated corporate tax rates applicable under prior law, which imposed a maximum tax rate of 35%, with a reduced 21% flat tax rate. Although the reduced tax rate generally was favorable to us by resulting in increased earnings and capital, it decreased the value of our existing deferred tax assets. Generally accepted accounting principles ("GAAP") required that the impact of the provisions of the Tax Act be accounted for in the period of enactment. Accordingly, the Company recorded an incremental income tax expense of \$2.4 million in the fourth quarter of 2017 related to the Tax Act, resulting primarily from a remeasurement of deferred tax assets of \$17.4 million.

**Employee Compensation.** A "publicly held corporation" is not permitted to deduct compensation in excess of \$1 million per year paid to certain employees. The Tax Act eliminated certain exceptions to the \$1 million limit applicable under prior law related to performance-based compensation, such as equity grants and cash bonuses that are paid only on the attainment of performance goals. As a result, our ability to deduct certain compensation paid to our most highly compensated employees is now limited.

**Business Asset Expensing.** The Tax Act allowed taxpayers immediately to expense the entire cost (instead of only 50%, as under prior law) of certain depreciable tangible property and real property improvements acquired and placed in service after September 27, 2017 and before January 1, 2023 (with an additional year for certain property). This 100% "bonus" depreciation is phased out proportionately for property placed in service on or after January 1, 2023 and before January 1, 2027 (with an additional year for certain property).

**Interest Expense.** The Tax Act limited a taxpayer's annual deduction of business interest expense to the sum of (i) business interest income and (ii) 30% of "adjusted taxable income," defined as a business's taxable income without taking into account business interest income or expense, net operating losses, and, for 2018 through 2021, depreciation, amortization and depletion. Because we generate significant amounts of net interest income, we do not expect to be impacted by this limitation.

### **Proposed Legislation and Regulatory Action**

From time to time, various legislative and regulatory initiatives are introduced in Congress and state legislatures, as well as by regulatory agencies. Such initiatives may include proposals to expand or contract the powers of bank holding companies and depository institutions or proposals to substantially change the financial institution regulatory system. Such legislation could change banking statutes and the operating environment of the Company in substantial and unpredictable ways. If enacted, such legislation could increase or decrease the cost of doing business, limit or expand permissible activities or affect the competitive balance among banks, savings associations, credit unions, and other financial institutions. We cannot predict whether any such legislation will be enacted, and, if enacted, the effect that it, or any implementing regulations, would have on the financial condition or results of operations of the Company. A change in statutes, regulations or regulatory policies applicable to the Company or the Bank could have a material effect on the business of the Company.



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### **Southern First Bancshares, Inc.**

We own 100% of the outstanding capital stock of the Bank, and therefore we are considered to be a bank holding company under the federal Bank Holding Company Act of 1956 (the "Bank Holding Company Act"). As a result, we are primarily subject to the supervision, examination and reporting requirements of the Federal Reserve under the Bank Holding Company Act and its regulations promulgated thereunder. Moreover, as a bank holding company of a bank located in South Carolina, we also are subject to the South Carolina Banking and Branching Efficiency Act.

**Permitted Activities.** Under the Bank Holding Company Act, a bank holding company is generally permitted to engage in, or acquire direct or indirect control of more than 5% of the voting shares of any company engaged in, the following activities:

banking or managing or controlling banks;  
furnishing services to or performing services for our subsidiaries; and  
any activity that the Federal Reserve determines to be so closely related to banking as to be a proper incident to the business of banking.

Activities that the Federal Reserve has found to be so closely related to banking as to be a proper incident to the business of banking include:

factoring accounts receivable;  
making, acquiring, brokering or servicing loans and usual related activities;  
leasing personal or real property;  
operating a non-bank depository institution, such as a savings association;  
trust company functions;  
financial and investment advisory activities;  
conducting discount securities brokerage activities;  
underwriting and dealing in government obligations and money market instruments;  
providing specified management consulting and counseling activities;  
performing selected data processing services and support services;  
acting as agent or broker in selling credit life insurance and other types of insurance in connection with credit transactions; and  
performing selected insurance underwriting activities.

As a bank holding company we also can elect to be treated as a "financial holding company," which would allow us to engage in a broader array of activities. In summary, a financial holding company can engage in activities that are financial in nature or incidental or complimentary to financial activities, including insurance underwriting, sales and brokerage activities, providing financial and investment advisory services, underwriting services and limited merchant banking activities. We have not sought financial holding company status, but may elect such status in the future as our business matures. If we were to elect financial holding company status, each insured depository institution we control would have to be well capitalized, well managed and have at least a satisfactory rating under the Community Reinvestment Act as discussed below.

The Federal Reserve has the authority to order a bank holding company or its subsidiaries to terminate any of these activities or to terminate its ownership or control of any subsidiary when it has reasonable cause to believe that the Bank holding company's continued ownership, activity or control constitutes a serious risk to the financial safety, soundness or stability of it or any of its bank subsidiaries.

**Change in Control.** Two statutes, the Bank Holding Company Act and the Change in Bank Control Act, together with regulations promulgated under them, require some form of regulatory review before any company may acquire "control" of a bank or a bank holding company. Under the Bank Holding Company Act, control is deemed to exist if a company acquires 25% or more of any class of voting securities of a bank holding company; controls the election of a majority of the members of the board of directors; or exercises a controlling influence over the management or policies of a bank or bank holding company. In guidance issued in 2008, the Federal Reserve has stated that it would not expect control to exist if a person acquires, in aggregate, less than 33% of the total equity of a bank or bank holding company (voting and nonvoting equity), provided such person's ownership does not include 15% or more of any class of voting securities. Prior Federal Reserve approval is necessary before an entity acquires sufficient control to become a bank holding company. Natural persons, certain non-business trusts, and other entities are not treated as companies (or bank holding companies), and their acquisitions are not subject to review under the Bank Holding Company Act. State laws generally, including South Carolina law, require state approval before an acquirer may become the holding company of a state

bank.

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Under the Change in Bank Control Act, a person or company is required to file a notice with the Federal Reserve if it will, as a result of the transaction, own or control 10% or more of any class of voting securities or direct the management or policies of a bank or bank holding company and either if the bank or bank holding company has registered securities or if the acquirer would be the largest holder of that class of voting securities after the acquisition. For a change in control at the holding company level, both the Federal Reserve and the subsidiary bank's primary federal regulator must approve the change in control; at the bank level, only the bank's primary federal regulator is involved. Transactions subject to the Bank Holding Company Act are exempt from Change in Control Act requirements. For state banks, state laws, including that of South Carolina, typically require approval by the state bank regulator as well.

**Source of Strength.** There are a number of obligations and restrictions imposed by law and regulatory policy on bank holding companies with regard to their depository institution subsidiaries that are designed to minimize potential loss to depositors and to the FDIC insurance funds in the event that the depository institution becomes in danger of defaulting under its obligations to repay deposits. Under a policy of the Federal Reserve, a bank holding company is required to serve as a source of financial strength to its subsidiary depository institutions and to commit resources to support such institutions in circumstances where it might not do so absent such policy. Under the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Improvement Act of 1991, to avoid receivership of its insured depository institution subsidiary, a bank holding company is required to guarantee the compliance of any insured depository institution subsidiary that may become "undercapitalized" within the terms of any capital restoration plan filed by such subsidiary with its appropriate federal banking agency up to the lesser of (i) an amount equal to 5% of the institution's total assets at the time the institution became undercapitalized, or (ii) the amount which is necessary (or would have been necessary) to bring the institution into compliance with all applicable capital standards as of the time the institution fails to comply with such capital restoration plan.

The Federal Reserve also has the authority under the Bank Holding Company Act to require a bank holding company to terminate any activity or relinquish control of a nonbank subsidiary (other than a nonbank subsidiary of a bank) upon the Federal Reserve's determination that such activity or control constitutes a serious risk to the financial soundness or stability of any subsidiary depository institution of the bank holding company. Further, federal law grants federal bank regulatory authorities' additional discretion to require a bank holding company to divest itself of any bank or nonbank subsidiary if the agency determines that divestiture may aid the depository institution's financial condition.

In addition, the "cross guarantee" provisions of the Federal Deposit Insurance Act (the "FDIA") require insured depository institutions under common control to reimburse the FDIC for any loss suffered or reasonably anticipated by the FDIC as a result of the default of a commonly controlled insured depository institution or for any assistance provided by the FDIC to a commonly controlled insured depository institution in danger of default. The FDIC's claim for damages is superior to claims of shareholders of the insured depository institution or its holding company, but is subordinate to claims of depositors, secured creditors and holders of subordinated debt (other than affiliates) of the commonly controlled insured depository institutions.

The FDIA also provides that amounts received from the liquidation or other resolution of any insured depository institution by any receiver must be distributed (after payment of secured claims) to pay the deposit liabilities of the institution prior to payment of any other general or unsecured senior liability, subordinated liability, general creditor or shareholder. This provision would give depositors a preference over general and subordinated creditors and shareholders in the event a receiver is appointed to distribute the assets of our Bank.

Any capital loans by a bank holding company to any of its subsidiary banks are subordinate in right of payment to deposits and to certain other indebtedness of such subsidiary bank. In the event of a bank holding company's bankruptcy, any commitment by the bank holding company to a federal bank regulatory agency to maintain the capital of a subsidiary bank will be assumed by the bankruptcy trustee and entitled to a priority of payment.

**Capital Requirements.** The Federal Reserve imposes certain capital requirements on the bank holding company under the Bank Holding Company Act, including a minimum leverage ratio and a minimum ratio of "qualifying" capital to risk-weighted assets. These requirements are described below under "Southern First Bank - Capital Regulations." Subject to our capital requirements and certain other restrictions, we are able to borrow money to make capital contributions to the Bank, and these loans may be repaid from dividends paid from the Bank to the Company.

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We are also able to raise capital for contribution to the Bank by issuing securities without having to receive regulatory approval, subject to compliance with federal and state securities laws.

**Dividends.** Since the Company is a bank holding company, its ability to declare and pay dividends is dependent on certain federal and state regulatory considerations, including the guidelines of the Federal Reserve. The Federal Reserve has issued a policy statement regarding the payment of dividends by bank holding companies. In general, the Federal Reserve's policies provide that dividends should be paid only out of current earnings and only if the prospective rate of earnings retention by the bank holding company appears consistent with the organization's capital needs, asset quality and overall financial condition. The Federal Reserve's policies also require that a bank holding company serve as a source of financial strength to its subsidiary banks by standing ready to use available resources to provide adequate capital funds to those banks during periods of financial stress or adversity and by maintaining the financial flexibility and capital-raising capacity to obtain additional resources for assisting its subsidiary banks where necessary. Further, under the prompt corrective action regulations, the ability of a bank holding company to pay dividends may be restricted if a subsidiary bank becomes undercapitalized. These regulatory policies could affect the ability of the Company to pay dividends or otherwise engage in capital distributions.

In addition, since the Company is a legal entity separate and distinct from the Bank and does not conduct stand-alone operations, its ability to pay dividends depends on the ability of the Bank to pay dividends to it, which is also subject to regulatory restrictions as described below in "Southern First Bank – Dividends."

**South Carolina State Regulation.** As a South Carolina bank holding company under the South Carolina Banking and Branching Efficiency Act, we are subject to limitations on sale or merger and to regulation by the South Carolina Board of Financial Institutions (the "S.C. Board"). We are not required to obtain the approval of the S.C. Board prior to acquiring the capital stock of a national bank, but we must notify them at least 15 days prior to doing so. We must receive the S.C. Board's approval prior to engaging in the acquisition of a South Carolina state chartered bank or another South Carolina bank holding company.

### **Southern First Bank**

As a South Carolina bank, deposits in the Bank are insured by the FDIC up to a maximum amount, which is currently \$250,000 per depositor. The S.C. Board and the FDIC regulate or monitor virtually all areas of the Bank's operations, including;

- security devices and procedures;
- adequacy of capitalization and loss reserves;
- loans;
- investments;
- borrowings;
- deposits;
- mergers;
- issuances of securities;
- payment of dividends;
- interest rates payable on deposits;
- interest rates or fees chargeable on loans;
- establishment of branches;
- corporate reorganizations;
- maintenance of books and records; and
- adequacy of staff training to carry on safe lending and deposit gathering practices.

These agencies, and the federal and state laws applicable to the Bank's operations, extensively regulate various aspects of our banking business, including, among other things, permissible types and amounts of loans, investments and other activities, capital adequacy, branching, interest rates on loans and on deposits, the maintenance of reserves on demand deposit liabilities, and the safety and soundness of our banking practices.

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All insured institutions must undergo regular on-site examinations by their appropriate banking agency. The cost of examinations of insured depository institutions and any affiliates may be assessed by the appropriate federal banking agency against each institution or affiliate as it deems necessary or appropriate. Insured institutions are required to submit annual reports to the FDIC, their federal regulatory agency, and state supervisor when applicable. The FDIC has developed a method for insured depository institutions to provide supplemental disclosure of the estimated fair market value of assets and liabilities, to the extent feasible and practicable, in any balance sheet, financial statement, report of condition or any other report of any insured depository institution. The FDIC and the other federal banking regulatory agencies also have issued standards for all insured depository institutions relating, among other things, to the following:

- internal controls;
- information systems and audit systems;
- loan documentation;
- credit underwriting;
- interest rate risk exposure; and
- asset quality.

**Prompt Corrective Action.** As an insured depository institution, the Bank is required to comply with the capital requirements promulgated under the FDIA and the prompt corrective action regulations thereunder, which set forth five capital categories, each with specific regulatory consequences. Under these regulations, the categories are:

**Well Capitalized** — The institution exceeds the required minimum level for each relevant capital measure. A well-capitalized institution (i) has a total risk-based capital ratio of 10% or greater, (ii) has a Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 8% or greater, (iii) has a common equity Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 6.5% or greater, (iv) has a leverage capital ratio of 5% or greater, and (v) is not subject to any order or written directive to meet and maintain a specific capital level for any capital measure.

**Adequately Capitalized** — The institution meets the required minimum level for each relevant capital measure. No capital distribution may be made that would result in the institution becoming undercapitalized. An adequately capitalized institution (i) has a total risk-based capital ratio of 8% or greater, (ii) has a Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 6% or greater, (iii) has a common equity Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 4.5% or greater, and (iv) has a leverage capital ratio of 4% or greater.

**Undercapitalized** — The institution fails to meet the required minimum level for any relevant capital measure. An undercapitalized institution (i) has a total risk-based capital ratio of less than 8%, (ii) has a Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of less than 6%, (iii) has a common equity Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of less than 4.5% or greater, or (iv) has a leverage capital ratio of less than 4%.

**Significantly Undercapitalized** — The institution is significantly below the required minimum level for any relevant capital measure. A significantly undercapitalized institution (i) has a total risk-based capital ratio of less than 6%, (ii) has a Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of less than 4%, (iii) has a common equity Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of less than 3% or greater, or (iv) has a leverage capital ratio of less than 3%.

**Critically Undercapitalized** — The institution fails to meet a critical capital level set by the appropriate federal banking agency. A critically undercapitalized institution has a ratio of tangible equity to total assets that is equal to or less than 2%.

If the FDIC determines, after notice and an opportunity for hearing, that the Bank is in an unsafe or unsound condition, the regulator is authorized to reclassify the Bank to the next lower capital category (other than critically undercapitalized) and require the submission of a plan to correct the unsafe or unsound condition.

If a bank is not well capitalized, it cannot accept brokered deposits without prior regulatory approval. Even if approved, rate restrictions will govern the rate a bank may pay on brokered deposits. In addition, a bank that is not well capitalized cannot offer an effective yield in excess of 75 basis points over interest paid on deposits of comparable size and maturity in such institution's normal market area for deposits accepted from within its normal market area, or national rate paid on deposits of comparable size and maturity for deposits accepted outside the bank's normal market area. Moreover, the FDIC generally prohibits a depository institution from making any capital distributions (including payment of a dividend) or paying any management fee to its parent holding company if the depository institution would thereafter be categorized as undercapitalized. Undercapitalized institutions are subject to growth limitations (an undercapitalized institution may not acquire another institution, establish additional branch offices or engage in any new line of business unless determined by the appropriate federal banking agency to be consistent with an

accepted capital restoration plan, or unless the FDIC determines that the proposed action will further the purpose of prompt corrective action) and are required to submit a capital restoration plan. The agencies may not accept a capital restoration plan without determining, among other things, that the plan is based on realistic assumptions and is likely to succeed in restoring the depository institution's capital. In addition, for a capital restoration plan to be acceptable, the depository institution's parent holding company must guarantee that the institution will comply with the capital restoration plan. The aggregate liability of the parent holding company is limited to the lesser of an amount equal to 5.0% of the depository institution's total assets at the time it became categorized as undercapitalized or the amount that is necessary (or would have been necessary) to bring the institution into compliance with all capital standards applicable with respect to such institution as of the time it fails to comply with the plan. If a depository institution fails to submit an acceptable plan, it is categorized as significantly undercapitalized.

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Significantly undercapitalized categorized depository institutions may be subject to a number of requirements and restrictions, including orders to sell sufficient voting stock to become categorized as adequately capitalized, requirements to reduce total assets, and cessation of receipt of deposits from correspondent banks. The appropriate federal banking agency may take any action authorized for a significantly undercapitalized institution if an undercapitalized institution fails to submit an acceptable capital restoration plan or fails in any material respect to implement a plan accepted by the agency. A critically undercapitalized institution is subject to having a receiver or conservator appointed to manage its affairs and for loss of its charter to conduct banking activities.

An insured depository institution may not pay a management fee to a bank holding company controlling that institution or any other person having control of the institution if, after making the payment, the institution would be undercapitalized. In addition, an institution cannot make a capital distribution, such as a dividend or other distribution, that is in substance a distribution of capital to the owners of the institution if following such a distribution the institution would be undercapitalized. Thus, if payment of such a management fee or the making of such would cause a bank to become undercapitalized, it could not pay a management fee or dividend to the bank holding company.

As of December 31, 2018, the Bank was deemed to be “well capitalized.”

**Standards for Safety and Soundness.** The FDIA also requires the federal banking regulatory agencies to prescribe, by regulation or guideline, operational and managerial standards for all insured depository institutions relating to: (i) internal controls, information systems and internal audit systems; (ii) loan documentation; (iii) credit underwriting; (iv) interest rate risk exposure; and (v) asset growth. The agencies also must prescribe standards for asset quality, earnings, and stock valuation, as well as standards for compensation, fees and benefits. The federal banking agencies have adopted regulations and Interagency Guidelines Prescribing Standards for Safety and Soundness to implement these required standards. These guidelines set forth the safety and soundness standards that the federal banking agencies use to identify and address problems at insured depository institutions before capital becomes impaired. Under the regulations, if the FDIC determines that the Bank fails to meet any standards prescribed by the guidelines, the agency may require the Bank to submit to the agency an acceptable plan to achieve compliance with the standard, as required by the FDIC. The final regulations establish deadlines for the submission and review of such safety and soundness compliance plans.

**Insurance of Accounts and Regulation by the FDIC.** The Bank's deposits are insured up to applicable limits by the Deposit Insurance Fund of the FDIC. The Dodd-Frank Act permanently increased the maximum amount of deposit insurance for banks to \$250,000 per account. As insurer, the FDIC imposes deposit insurance premiums and is authorized to conduct examinations of and to require reporting by FDIC insured institutions. It also may prohibit any FDIC insured institution from engaging in any activity the FDIC determines by regulation or order to pose a serious risk to the insurance fund.

As an FDIC-insured bank, the Bank must pay deposit insurance assessments to the FDIC based on its average total assets minus its average tangible equity. The Bank's assessment rates are currently based on its risk classification (i.e., the level of risk it poses to the FDIC's deposit insurance fund). Institutions classified as higher risk pay assessments at higher rates than institutions that pose a lower risk. In addition to ordinary assessments described above, the FDIC has the ability to impose special assessments in certain instances.

The FDIC's deposit insurance fund is currently underfunded, and the FDIC has raised assessment rates and imposed special assessments on certain institutions during recent years to raise funds. Under the Dodd-Frank Act, the minimum designated reserve ratio for the deposit insurance fund is 1.35% of the estimated total amount of insured deposits. In October 2010, the FDIC adopted a restoration plan to ensure that the fund reserve ratio reaches 1.35% by September 30, 2020, as required by the Dodd-Frank Act. At least semi-annually, the FDIC will update its loss and income projections for the fund and, if needed, will increase or decrease assessment rates, following notice-and-comment rulemaking if required.

In addition, FDIC insured institutions are required to pay a Financing Corporation assessment to fund the interest on bonds issued to resolve thrift failures in the 1980s. These assessments, which may be revised based upon the level of deposits, will continue until the bonds mature in the years 2017 through 2019. The amount assessed on individual institutions is in addition to the amount, if any, paid for deposit insurance according to the FDIC's risk-related assessment rate schedules. Assessment rates may be adjusted quarterly to reflect changes in the assessment base.

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The FDIC may terminate the deposit insurance of any insured depository institution, including the Bank, if it determines after a hearing that the institution has engaged in unsafe or unsound practices, is in an unsafe or unsound condition to continue operations or has violated any applicable law, regulation, rule, order or condition imposed by the FDIC. It also may suspend deposit insurance temporarily during the hearing process for the permanent termination of insurance if the institution has no tangible capital. If insurance of accounts is terminated, the accounts at the institution at the time of the termination, less subsequent withdrawals, shall continue to be insured for a period of six months to two years, as determined by the FDIC. Management is not aware of any practice, condition or violation that might lead to termination of the Bank's deposit insurance.

**Transactions with Affiliates and Insiders.** The Company is a legal entity separate and distinct from the Bank and its other subsidiaries. Various legal limitations restrict the Bank from lending or otherwise supplying funds to the Company or its non-bank subsidiaries. The Company and the Bank are subject to Sections 23A and 23B of the Federal Reserve Act and Federal Reserve Regulation W.

Section 23A of the Federal Reserve Act places limits on the amount of loans or extensions of credit by a bank to any affiliate, including its holding company, and on a bank's investments in, or certain other transactions with, affiliates and on the amount of advances to third parties collateralized by the securities or obligations of any affiliates of the bank. Section 23A also applies to derivative transactions, repurchase agreements and securities lending and borrowing transactions that cause a bank to have credit exposure to an affiliate. The aggregate of all covered transactions is limited in amount, as to any one affiliate, to 10% of the Bank's capital and surplus and, as to all affiliates combined, to 20% of the Bank's capital and surplus. Furthermore, within the foregoing limitations as to amount, each covered transaction must meet specified collateral requirements. The Bank is forbidden to purchase low quality assets from an affiliate.

Section 23B of the Federal Reserve Act, among other things, prohibits an institution from engaging in certain transactions with certain affiliates unless the transactions are on terms substantially the same, or at least as favorable to such institution or its subsidiaries, as those prevailing at the time for comparable transactions with nonaffiliated companies. If there are no comparable transactions, a bank's (or one of its subsidiaries') affiliate transaction must be on terms and under circumstances, including credit standards, that in good faith would be offered to, or would apply to, nonaffiliated companies. These requirements apply to all transactions subject to Section 23A as well as to certain other transactions.

The affiliates of a bank include any holding company of the bank, any other company under common control with the bank (including any company controlled by the same shareholders who control the bank), any subsidiary of the bank that is itself a bank, any company in which the majority of the directors or trustees also constitute a majority of the directors or trustees of the bank or holding company of the bank, any company sponsored and advised on a contractual basis by the bank or an affiliate, and any mutual fund advised by a bank or any of the bank's affiliates. Regulation W generally excludes all non-bank and non-savings association subsidiaries of banks from treatment as affiliates, except to the extent that the Federal Reserve decides to treat these subsidiaries as affiliates.

The Bank is also subject to certain restrictions on extensions of credit to executive officers, directors, certain principal shareholders, and their related interests. Extensions of credit include derivative transactions, repurchase and reverse repurchase agreements, and securities borrowing and lending transactions to the extent that such transactions cause a bank to have credit exposure to an insider. Any extension of credit to an insider (i) must be made on substantially the same terms, including interest rates and collateral requirements, as those prevailing at the time for comparable transactions with unrelated third parties and (ii) must not involve more than the normal risk of repayment or present other unfavorable features.

**Dividends.** The Company's principal source of cash flow, including cash flow to pay dividends to its shareholders, is dividends it receives from the Bank. Statutory and regulatory limitations apply to the Bank's payment of dividends to the Company. As a South Carolina chartered bank, the Bank is subject to limitations on the amount of dividends that it is permitted to pay. Unless otherwise instructed by the S.C. Board, the Bank is generally permitted under South Carolina state banking regulations to pay cash dividends of up to 100% of net income in any calendar year without obtaining the prior approval of the S.C. Board. The FDIC also has the authority under federal law to enjoin a bank from engaging in what in its opinion constitutes an unsafe or unsound practice in conducting its business, including the payment of a dividend under certain circumstances.

**Branching.** Under current South Carolina law, the Bank may open branch offices throughout South Carolina with the prior approval of the S.C. Board. In addition, with prior regulatory approval, the Bank is able to acquire existing banking operations in South Carolina. Furthermore, federal legislation permits interstate branching, including out-of-state acquisitions by bank holding companies, interstate branching by banks, and interstate merging by banks. The Dodd-Frank Act removes previous state law restrictions on de novo interstate branching in states such as South Carolina. This change permits out-of-state banks to open de novo branches in states where the laws of the state where the de novo branch to be opened would permit a bank chartered by that

state to open a de novo branch.

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**Community Reinvestment Act.** The Community Reinvestment Act (“CRA”) requires that the FDIC evaluate the record of the Bank in meeting the credit needs of its local community, including low and moderate income neighborhoods. These factors are also considered in evaluating mergers, acquisitions, and applications to open a branch or facility. Failure to adequately meet these criteria could impose additional requirements and limitations on our Bank.

The Gramm Leach Bliley Act (the “GLBA”) made various changes to the CRA. Among other changes, CRA agreements with private parties must be disclosed and annual CRA reports must be made available to a bank’s primary federal regulator. A bank holding company will not be permitted to become a financial holding company and no new activities authorized under the GLBA may be commenced by a holding company or by a bank financial subsidiary if any of its bank subsidiaries received less than a satisfactory CRA rating in its latest CRA examination.

On February 12, 2018, the date of the most recent examination report, the Bank received a satisfactory CRA rating.

**Consumer Protection Regulations.** Activities of the Bank are subject to a variety of statutes and regulations designed to protect consumers. Interest and other charges collected or contracted for by the Bank are subject to state usury laws and federal laws concerning interest rates. The Bank’s loan operations are also subject to federal laws applicable to credit transactions, such as:

The Dodd-Frank Act that created the CFPB within the Federal Reserve Board, which has broad rulemaking authority over a wide range of consumer laws that apply to all insured depository institutions;

the Truth-In-Lending Act, governing disclosures of credit terms to consumer borrowers;

the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975, requiring financial institutions to provide information to enable the public and public officials to determine whether a financial institution is fulfilling its obligation to help meet the housing needs of the community it serves;

the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, creed or other prohibited factors in extending credit;

the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1978, as amended by the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act, governing the use and provision of information to credit reporting agencies, certain identity theft protections, and certain credit and other disclosures;

the Fair Debt Collection Act, governing the manner in which consumer debts may be collected by collection agencies; and

the rules and regulations of the various federal agencies charged with the responsibility of implementing such federal laws.

The deposit operations of the Bank also are subject to:

the Federal Deposit Insurance Act, which, among other things, limits the amount of deposit insurance available per account to \$250,000 and imposes other limits on deposit-taking;

the Right to Financial Privacy Act, which imposes a duty to maintain confidentiality of consumer financial records and prescribes procedures for complying with administrative subpoenas of financial records;

the Electronic Funds Transfer Act and Regulation E, which governs automatic deposits to and withdrawals from deposit accounts and customers’ rights and liabilities arising from the use of automated teller machines and other electronic banking services;

The Check Clearing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (also known as “Check 21”), which gives “substitute check,” such as digital images and copies made from that image, the same legal standing as the original paper check; and

the Truth in Savings Act and Regulation DD, which requires depository institutions to provide disclosures so that consumers can make meaningful comparisons about depository institutions and accounts.

**Anti-Money Laundering.** Financial institutions must maintain anti-money laundering programs that include established internal policies, procedures, and controls; a designated compliance officer; an ongoing employee training program; and testing of the program by an independent audit function. The Company and the Bank are also prohibited from entering into specified financial transactions and account relationships and must meet enhanced standards for due diligence and “knowing your customer” in their dealings with foreign financial institutions and foreign customers. Financial institutions must take reasonable steps to conduct enhanced scrutiny of account relationships to guard against money laundering and to report any suspicious transactions, and recent laws provide law enforcement authorities with increased access to financial information maintained by banks. Anti-money laundering obligations have been substantially strengthened as a result of the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing



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Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (which we refer to as the "USA PATRIOT Act"), enacted in 2001 and renewed through 2019. Bank regulators routinely examine institutions for compliance with these obligations and are required to consider compliance in connection with the regulatory review of applications. The regulatory authorities have been active in imposing "cease and desist" orders and money penalty sanctions against institutions that have not complied with these requirements.

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**USA PATRIOT Act.** The USA PATRIOT Act became effective on October 26, 2001, amended, in part, the Bank Secrecy Act and provides, in part, for the facilitation of information sharing among governmental entities and financial institutions for the purpose of combating terrorism and money laundering by enhancing anti-money laundering and financial transparency laws, as well as enhanced information collection tools and enforcement mechanics for the U.S. government, including: (i) requiring standards for verifying customer identification at account opening; (ii) rules to promote cooperation among financial institutions, regulators, and law enforcement entities in identifying parties that may be involved in terrorism or money laundering; (iii) reports by nonfinancial trades and businesses filed with the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network for transactions exceeding \$10,000; and (iv) filing suspicious activities reports by brokers and dealers if they believe a customer may be violating U.S. laws and regulations. The Act also requires enhanced due diligence requirements for financial institutions that administer, maintain, or manage private bank accounts or correspondent accounts for non-U.S. persons. Bank regulators routinely examine institutions for compliance with these obligations and are required to consider compliance in connection with the regulatory review of applications.

Under the USA PATRIOT Act, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network ("FinCEN") can send our banking regulatory agencies lists of the names of persons suspected of involvement in terrorist activities. The Bank can be requested, to search its records for any relationships or transactions with persons on those lists. If the Bank finds any relationships or transactions, it must file a suspicious activity report and contact FinCEN.

**The Office of Foreign Assets Control.** The Office of Foreign Assets Control ("OFAC"), which is a division of the U.S. Treasury, is responsible for helping to insure that U.S. entities do not engage in transactions with "enemies" of the U.S., as defined by various Executive Orders and Acts of Congress. OFAC has sent, and will send, our banking regulatory agencies lists of names of persons and organizations suspected of aiding, harboring or engaging in terrorist acts. If the Bank finds a name on any transaction, account or wire transfer that is on an OFAC list, it must freeze such account, file a suspicious activity report and notify the FBI. The Bank has appointed an OFAC compliance officer to oversee the inspection of its accounts and the filing of any notifications. The Bank actively checks high-risk OFAC areas such as new accounts, wire transfers and customer files. The Bank performs these checks utilizing software, which is updated each time a modification is made to the lists provided by OFAC and other agencies of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons.

**Privacy, Data Security and Credit Reporting.** Financial institutions are required to disclose their policies for collecting and protecting confidential information. Customers generally may prevent financial institutions from sharing nonpublic personal financial information with nonaffiliated third parties except under narrow circumstances, such as the processing of transactions requested by the consumer or if the Bank is jointly sponsoring a product or service with a nonaffiliated third party. Additionally, financial institutions generally may not disclose consumer account numbers to any nonaffiliated third party for use in telemarketing, direct mail marketing or other marketing to consumers. It is the Bank's policy not to disclose any personal information unless required by law.

Recent cyberattacks against banks and other institutions that resulted in unauthorized access to confidential customer information have prompted the Federal banking agencies to issue several warnings and extensive guidance on cyber security. The agencies are likely to devote more resources to this part of their safety and soundness examination than they have in the past.

In addition, pursuant to the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003 (the "FACT Act") and the implementing regulations of the federal banking agencies and Federal Trade Commission, the Bank is required to have in place an "identity theft red flags" program to detect, prevent and mitigate identity theft. The Bank has implemented an identity theft red flags program designed to meet the requirements of the FACT Act and the joint final rules. Additionally, the FACT Act amends the Fair Credit Reporting Act to generally prohibit a person from using information received from an affiliate to make a solicitation for marketing purposes to a consumer, unless the consumer is given notice and a reasonable opportunity and a reasonable and simple method to opt out of the making of such solicitations.

**Federal Home Loan Bank System.** The Bank is a member of the Federal Home Loan Bank ("FHLB") of Atlanta, which is one of 12 regional FHLBs that administer home financing credit for depository institutions. Each FHLB serves as a reserve or central bank for its members within its assigned region. It is funded primarily from proceeds derived from the sale of consolidated obligations of the FHLB System. It makes loans or advances to members in accordance with policies and procedures established by the Board of Directors of the FHLB, which are subject to the oversight of the Federal Housing Financing Board. All advances from the FHLB, which are subject to the oversight of the Federal Housing Finance Board. All advances from the FHLB are required to be fully secured by sufficient collateral as determined by the FHLB.

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**Effect of Governmental Monetary Policies.** Our earnings are affected by domestic economic conditions and the monetary and fiscal policies of the U.S. government and its agencies. The Federal Reserve's monetary policies have had, and are likely to continue to have, an important impact on the operating results of commercial banks through its power to implement national monetary policy in order, among other things, to curb inflation or combat a recession. The monetary policies of the Federal Reserve have major effects upon the levels of bank loans, investments and deposits through its open market operations in U.S. government securities and through its regulation of the discount rate on borrowings of member banks and the reserve requirements against member bank deposits. It is not possible to predict the nature or impact of future changes in monetary and fiscal policies. On March 21, 2018, June 13, 2018, September 26, 2018 and December 18, 2018, the Federal Open Market Committee raised the federal funds target rate by 25 basis points, as expected from the previous year. Further increases may occur in 2019, but, if so, there is no announced timetable.

**Incentive Compensation.** The Dodd-Frank Act requires the federal bank regulators and the SEC to establish joint regulations or guidelines prohibiting incentive-based payment arrangements at specified regulated entities having at least \$1 billion in total assets that encourage inappropriate risks by providing an executive officer, employee, director or principal stockholder with excessive compensation, fees, or benefits or that could lead to material financial loss to the entity. In addition, these regulators must establish regulations or guidelines requiring enhanced disclosure to regulators of incentive-based compensation arrangements. The agencies proposed such regulations in April 2011. However, the 2011 proposal was replaced with a new proposal in May 2016, which makes explicit that the involvement of risk management and control personnel includes not only compliance, risk management and internal audit, but also legal, human resources, accounting, financial reporting and finance roles responsible for identifying, measuring, monitoring or controlling risk-taking. A final rule had not been adopted as of December 31, 2018.

In June 2010, the Federal Reserve, the FDIC and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency issued a comprehensive final guidance on incentive compensation policies intended to ensure that the incentive compensation policies of banking organizations do not undermine the safety and soundness of such organizations by encouraging excessive risk-taking. The guidance, which covers all employees that have the ability to materially affect the risk profile of an organization, either individually or as part of a group, is based upon the key principles that a banking organization's incentive compensation arrangements should (i) provide incentives that do not encourage risk-taking beyond the organization's ability to effectively identify and manage risks, (ii) be compatible with effective internal controls and risk management, and (iii) be supported by strong corporate governance, including active and effective oversight by the organization's board of directors.

The Federal Reserve will review, as part of the regular, risk-focused examination process, the incentive compensation arrangements of banking organizations, such as the Company, that are not "large, complex banking organizations." These reviews will be tailored to each organization based on the scope and complexity of the organization's activities and the prevalence of incentive compensation arrangements. The findings of the supervisory initiatives will be included in reports of examination. Deficiencies will be incorporated into the organization's supervisory ratings, which can affect the organization's ability to make acquisitions and take other actions. Enforcement actions may be taken against a banking organization if its incentive compensation arrangements, or related risk-management control or governance processes, pose a risk to the organization's safety and soundness and the organization is not taking prompt and effective measures to correct the deficiencies.

The Dodd-Frank Act required the federal banking agencies, the SEC, and certain other federal agencies to jointly issue a regulation on incentive compensation. The agencies proposed such a rule in 2011, which reflected the 2010 guidance. However, the 2011 proposal was replaced with a new proposal rule in May 2016, which makes explicit that the involvement of risk management and control personnel includes not only compliance, risk management and internal audit, but also legal, human resources, accounting, financial reporting and finance roles responsible for identifying, measuring, monitoring or controlling risk-taking. A final rule had not been adopted as of December 31, 2018.

**Concentrations in Commercial Real Estate.** Concentration risk exists when FDIC-insured institutions deploy too many assets to any one industry or segment. A concentration in commercial real estate is one example of regulatory concern. The interagency Concentrations in Commercial Real Estate Lending, Sound Risk Management Practices guidance ("CRE Guidance") provides supervisory criteria, including the following numerical indicators, to assist bank examiners in identifying banks with potentially significant commercial real estate loan concentrations that may warrant greater supervisory scrutiny: (i) commercial real estate loans exceeding 300% of capital and increasing 50% or more in the preceding three years or (ii) construction and land development loans exceeding 100% of capital. The CRE Guidance does not limit banks' levels of commercial real estate lending activities, but rather guides institutions in developing risk management practices and levels of capital that are commensurate with the level and nature of their commercial real estate concentrations. On December 18, 2015, the federal banking agencies issued a statement to reinforce prudent risk-management practices related to commercial real estate lending, having observed substantial growth in many commercial real estate asset and lending markets, increased competitive pressures, rising commercial real estate concentrations in banks, and an easing of commercial real estate underwriting standards. The federal bank agencies reminded

FDIC-insured institutions to maintain underwriting discipline and exercise prudent risk-management practices to identify, measure, monitor and manage the risks arising from commercial real estate lending. In addition, FDIC-insured institutions must maintain capital commensurate with the level and nature of their commercial real estate concentration risk. Based on the Bank's loan portfolio as of December 31, 2018, it did not exceed the 300% and 100% guidelines for commercial real estate loans. The Bank will continue to monitor its portfolio to manage this increased risk.

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### **Item 1A. Risk Factors.**

The following risk factors and other information included in this Annual Report on Form 10-K should be carefully considered. The risks and uncertainties described below are not the only ones we face. Additional risks and uncertainties not presently known to us or that we currently deem immaterial also may adversely impact our business operations. If any of the following risks occur, our business, financial condition, operating results, and cash flows could be materially adversely affected.

#### **Risks Related to our Business**

##### ***Liquidity needs could adversely affect our financial condition and results of operations.***

Dividends from the Bank provide the primary source of funds for the Company. The primary sources of funds of the Bank are client deposits and loan repayments. While scheduled loan repayments are a relatively stable source of funds, they are subject to the ability of borrowers to repay the loans. The ability of borrowers to repay loans can be adversely affected by a number of factors, including changes in economic conditions, adverse trends or events affecting business industry groups, reductions in real estate values or markets, business closings or lay-offs, inclement weather, natural disasters and international instability.

Additionally, deposit levels may be affected by a number of factors, including rates paid by competitors, general interest rate levels, regulatory capital requirements, returns available to clients on alternative investments and general economic conditions. Accordingly, we may be required from time to time to rely on secondary sources of liquidity to meet withdrawal demands or otherwise fund operations. Such sources include proceeds from FHLB advances, sales of investment securities and loans, and federal funds lines of credit from correspondent banks, as well as out-of-market time deposits. While we believe that these sources are currently adequate, there can be no assurance they will be sufficient to meet future liquidity demands, particularly if we continue to grow and experience increasing loan demand. We may be required to slow or discontinue loan growth, capital expenditures or other investments or liquidate assets should such sources not be adequate.

The Company is a stand-alone entity with its own liquidity needs to service its debt or other obligations. Other than dividends from the Bank, the Company does not have additional means of generating liquidity without obtaining additional debt or equity funding. If we are unable to receive dividends from the Bank or obtain additional funding, we may be unable to pay our debt or other obligations.

##### ***Changes in prevailing interest rates may reduce our profitability.***

Our results of operations depend in large part upon the level of our net interest income, which is the difference between interest income from interest-earning assets, such as loans and investment securities, and interest expense on interest-bearing liabilities, such as deposits and other borrowings. Depending on the terms and maturities of our assets and liabilities, a significant change in interest rates could have a material adverse effect on our profitability. Many factors cause changes in interest rates, including governmental monetary policies and domestic and international economic and political conditions. As of December 31, 2018, approximately 76% of our loan portfolio was in fixed rate loans, while only 24% was in variable rate loans. In a rising rate environment, the higher percentage of fixed rate loans could have an adverse effect on our profitability. While we intend to manage the effects of changes in interest rates by adjusting the terms, maturities, and pricing of our assets and liabilities, our efforts may not be effective and our financial condition and results of operations could suffer.

##### ***We may not be able to adequately anticipate and respond to changes in market interest rates.***

We may be unable to anticipate changes in market interest rates, which are affected by many factors beyond our control including but not limited to inflation, recession, unemployment, money supply, monetary policy, and other changes that affect financial markets both domestic and foreign. Our net interest income is affected not only by the level and direction of interest rates, but also by the shape of the yield curve and relationships between interest sensitive instruments and key driver rates, as well as balance sheet growth, client loan and deposit preferences, and the timing of changes in these variables. In the event rates increase, our interest costs on liabilities may increase more rapidly than our income on interest-earning assets, resulting in a deterioration of net interest margins. As such, fluctuations in interest rates could have significant adverse effects on our financial condition and results of operations.

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In addition, our mortgage operations provide a portion of our noninterest income. We generate mortgage revenues primarily from gains on the sale of residential mortgage loans pursuant to programs currently offered by Fannie Mae, Ginnie Mae or Freddie Mac. In a rising or higher interest rate environment, our originations of mortgage loans may decrease, resulting in fewer loans that are available to be sold to investors, which would decrease mortgage revenues in noninterest income. In addition, our results of operations are affected by the amount of noninterest expenses associated with mortgage activities, such as salaries and employee benefits, other loan expense, and other costs. During periods of reduced loan demand, our results of operations may be adversely affected to the extent that we are unable to reduce expenses commensurate with the decline in loan originations.

### ***Our business may be adversely affected by conditions in the financial markets and economic conditions generally.***

Our financial performance generally, and in particular the ability of borrowers to pay interest on and repay principal of outstanding loans and the value of collateral securing those loans, as well as demand for loans and other products and services we offer, is highly dependent upon the business environment in the primary markets where we operate and in the U.S. as a whole. Unfavorable or uncertain economic and market conditions can be caused by declines in economic growth, business activity or investor or business confidence; limitations on the availability or increases in the cost of credit and capital; increases in inflation or interest rates; high unemployment, natural disasters; or a combination of these or other factors. While economic conditions in our local markets have improved since the end of the economic recession, economic growth has been slow and uneven and concerns still exist over the federal deficit, government spending, and economic risks. A return of recessionary conditions and/or negative developments in the domestic and international credit markets may significantly affect the markets in which we do business, the value of our loans and investments, and our ongoing operations, costs and profitability. Declines in real estate value and sales volumes and high unemployment levels may result in higher than expected loan delinquencies and a decline in demand for our products and services. These negative events may cause us to incur losses and may adversely affect our capital, liquidity, and financial condition.

Furthermore, the Federal Reserve, in an attempt to help the overall economy, has among other things, kept interest rates low through its targeted federal funds rate and the purchase of U.S. Treasury and mortgage-backed securities. The Federal Reserve increased the target range for the federal funds rate by 25 basis points in March, June, September and December 2018 and has indicated the potential for further gradual increases in the target rate depending on the economic outlook. As the federal funds rate increases, market interest rates will likely rise, which may negatively impact the housing markets and the U.S. economic recovery.

### ***Our small- to medium-sized business target markets may have fewer financial resources to weather a downturn in the economy.***

We target the banking and financial services needs of small- and medium-sized businesses. These businesses generally have fewer financial resources in terms of capital borrowing capacity than larger entities. If general economic conditions negatively affect these businesses in the markets in which we operate, our business, financial condition, and results of operations may be adversely affected.

### ***Competition with other financial institutions may have an adverse effect on our ability to retain and grow our client base, which could have a negative effect on our financial condition or results of operations.***

The banking and financial services industry is very competitive and includes services offered from other banks, savings and loan associations, credit unions, mortgage companies, other lenders, and institutions offering uninsured investment alternatives. Legal and regulatory developments have made it easier for new and sometimes unregulated competitors to compete with us. The financial services industry has and is experiencing an ongoing trend towards consolidation in which fewer large national and regional banks and other financial institutions are replacing many smaller and more local banks. These larger banks and other financial institutions hold a large accumulation of assets and have significantly greater resources and a wider geographic presence or greater accessibility. In some instances, these larger entities operate without the traditional brick and mortar facilities that restrict geographic presence. Some competitors have more aggressive marketing campaigns and better brand recognition, and are able to offer more services, more favorable pricing or greater customer convenience than the Bank. In addition, competition has increased from new banks and other financial services providers that target our existing or potential clients. As consolidation continues among large banks, we expect other smaller institutions to try to compete in the markets we serve. This competition could reduce our net income by decreasing the number and size of the loans that we originate and the interest rates we charge on these loans. Additionally, these competitors may offer higher interest rates, which could decrease the deposits we attract or require us to increase rates to retain existing deposits or attract new deposits. Increased deposit competition could adversely affect our ability to generate the funds necessary for lending operations which could increase our cost of funds.



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The financial services industry could become even more competitive as a result of legislative, regulatory and technological changes and continued consolidation. Banks, securities firms and insurance companies can merge as part of a financial holding company, which can offer virtually any type of financial service, including banking, securities underwriting, insurance (both agency and underwriting) and merchant banking. Technological developments have allowed competitors, including some non-depository institutions, to compete more effectively in local markets and have expanded the range of financial products, services and capital available to our target clients. If we are unable to implement, maintain and use such technologies effectively, we may not be able to offer products or achieve cost-efficiencies necessary to compete in the industry. In addition, some of these competitors have fewer regulatory constraints and lower cost structures.

***We are dependent on key individuals and the loss of one or more of these key individuals could curtail our growth and adversely affect our prospects.***

R. Arthur Seaver, Jr., our chief executive officer, F. Justin Strickland, our president, and Michael D. Dowling, our chief financial officer, each has extensive and long-standing ties within our primary market area and substantial experience with our operations, and each has contributed significantly to our growth. If we lose the services of any of these individuals, they would be difficult to replace and our business and development could be materially and adversely affected.

Our success also depends, in part, on our continued ability to attract and retain experienced loan originators, as well as other management personnel, including our other executive vice presidents. Competition for personnel is intense, and we may not be successful in attracting or retaining qualified personnel. Our failure to compete for these personnel, or the loss of the services of several of such key personnel, could adversely affect our growth strategy and seriously harm our business, results of operations, and financial condition.

***The success of our growth strategy depends on our ability to identify and retain individuals with experience and relationships in the markets in which we intend to expand.***

To expand our franchise successfully, we must identify and retain experienced key management members with local expertise and relationships in these markets. We expect that competition for qualified management in the markets in which we may expand will be intense and that there will be a limited number of qualified persons with knowledge of and experience in the community banking industry in these markets. Even if we identify individuals that we believe could assist us in establishing a presence in a new market, we may be unable to recruit these individuals away from more established financial institutions. In addition, the process of identifying and recruiting individuals with the combination of skills and attributes required to carry out our strategy requires both management and financial resources and is often lengthy. Our inability to identify, recruit, and retain talented personnel to manage new offices effectively would limit our growth and could materially adversely affect our business, financial condition, and results of operations.

***We will face risks with respect to future expansion.***

We may expand into new markets, as we did in Columbia, South Carolina in 2007, Charleston, South Carolina in 2012, Raleigh, North Carolina in 2017, Atlanta, Georgia in 2017, Summerville, South Carolina in February 2018 and Greensboro, North Carolina in April 2018. We may also expand our lines of business or offer new products or services as well as seek to acquire other financial institutions or parts of those institutions. These activities would involve a number of risks, including:

- the time and costs of evaluating new markets, hiring or retaining experienced local management, and opening new offices and the time lags between these activities and the generation of sufficient assets and deposits to support the costs of the expansion;
- the incurrence and possible impairment of goodwill associated with an acquisition and possible adverse effects on our results of operations;
- the potential inaccuracy of the estimates and judgments used to evaluate credit, operations, management, and market risks with respect to a target institution;
- the risk that we may be unsuccessful in attracting and retaining deposits and originating high quality loans in these new markets;
- and
- the risk of loss of key employees and clients.



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### ***A significant portion of our loan portfolio is secured by real estate, and events that negatively affect the real estate market could hurt our business.***

As of December 31, 2018, approximately 82.3% of our loans had real estate as a primary or secondary component of collateral. The real estate collateral in each case provides an alternate source of repayment in the event of default by the borrower and may deteriorate in value during the time the credit is extended. A weakening of the real estate market in our primary market areas could result in an increase in the number of borrowers who default on their loans and a reduction in the value of the collateral securing their loans, which in turn could have an adverse effect on our profitability and asset quality. Deterioration in the real estate market could cause us to adjust our opinion of the level of credit quality in our loan portfolio. If we are required to liquidate the collateral securing a loan to satisfy the debt during a period of reduced real estate values, our earnings and capital could be adversely affected. Acts of nature, including hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, fires and floods, which may cause uninsured damage and other loss of value to real estate that secures these loans, may also negatively affect our financial condition.

### ***Our loan portfolio contains a number of real estate loans with relatively large balances.***

Because our loan portfolio contains a number of real estate loans with relatively large balances, the deterioration of one or a few of these loans could cause a significant increase in nonperforming loans, which could result in a net loss of earnings, an increase in the provision for loan losses and an increase in loan charge-offs, all of which could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition and results of operations.

### ***Commercial real estate loans increase our exposure to credit risk.***

At December 31, 2018, 51.0% of our loan portfolio was secured by commercial real estate. Loans secured by commercial real estate are generally viewed as having more risk of default than loans secured by residential real estate or consumer loans because repayment of the loans often depends on the successful operation of the property, the income stream of the borrowers, the accuracy of the estimate of the property's value at completion of construction, and the estimated cost of construction. Such loans are generally more risky than loans secured by residential real estate or consumer loans because those loans are typically not secured by real estate collateral. An adverse development with respect to one lending relationship can expose us to a significantly greater risk of loss compared with a single-family residential mortgage loan because we typically have more than one loan with such borrowers. Additionally, these loans typically involve larger loan balances to single borrowers or groups of related borrowers compared with single-family residential mortgage loans. Therefore, the deterioration of one or a few of these loans could cause a significant decline in the related asset quality. While economic conditions and real estate in our local markets have improved since the end of the economic recession, a return of recessionary conditions could result in a sharp increase in loans charged-off and could require us to significantly increase our allowance for loan losses, which could have a material adverse impact on our business, financial condition, results of operations, and cash flows.

### ***Imposition of limits by the bank regulators on commercial and multi-family real estate lending activities could curtail our growth and adversely affect our earnings.***

In 2006, the FDIC, the Federal Reserve and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency issued joint guidance entitled "Concentrations in Commercial Real Estate Lending, Sound Risk Management Practices" (the "CRE Guidance"). Although the CRE Guidance did not establish specific lending limits, it provides that a bank's commercial real estate lending exposure could receive increased supervisory scrutiny where total non-owner occupied commercial real estate loans, including loans secured by apartment buildings, investor commercial real estate, and construction and land loans, represent 300% or more of an institution's total risk-based capital, and the outstanding balance of the commercial real estate loan portfolio has increased by 50% or more during the preceding 36 months. Our level of commercial real estate and multi-family loans represents 236.8% of the Bank's total risk-based capital at December 31, 2018.

In December 2015, the regulatory agencies released a new statement on prudent risk management for commercial real estate lending (the "2015 Statement"). In the 2015 Statement, the regulatory agencies, among other things, indicate the intent to continue "to pay special attention" to commercial real estate lending activities and concentrations going forward. If the FDIC, our primary federal regulator, were to impose restrictions on the amount of commercial real estate loans we can hold in our portfolio, for reasons noted above or otherwise, our earnings would be adversely affected.

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***Repayment of our commercial business loans is often dependent on the cash flows of the borrower, which may be unpredictable, and the collateral securing these loans may fluctuate in value.***

At December 31, 2018, commercial business loans comprised 16.3% of our total loan portfolio. Our commercial business loans are originated primarily based on the identified cash flow and general liquidity of the borrower and secondarily on the underlying collateral provided by the borrower and/or repayment capacity of any guarantor. The borrower's cash flow may be unpredictable, and collateral securing these loans may fluctuate in value. Although commercial business loans are often collateralized by equipment, inventory, accounts receivable, or other business assets, the liquidation of collateral in the event of default is often an insufficient source of repayment because accounts receivable may be uncollectible and inventories may be obsolete or of limited use. In addition, business assets may depreciate over time, may be difficult to appraise, and may fluctuate in value based on the success of the business. Accordingly, the repayment of commercial business loans depends primarily on the cash flow and credit worthiness of the borrower and secondarily on the underlying collateral value provided by the borrower and liquidity of the guarantor. If these borrowers do not have sufficient cash flows or resources to pay these loans as they come due or the value of the underlying collateral is insufficient to fully secure these loans, we may suffer losses on these loans that exceed our allowance for loan losses.

***We may have higher loan losses than we have allowed for in our allowance for loan losses.***

Our actual loans losses could exceed our allowance for loan losses and therefore our historic allowance for loan losses may not be adequate. As of December 31, 2018, 51.0% of our loan portfolio was secured by commercial real estate. Repayment of such loans is generally considered more subject to market risk than residential mortgage loans. Industry experience shows that a portion of loans will become delinquent and a portion of loans will require partial or entire charge-off. Regardless of the underwriting criteria utilized, losses may be experienced as a result of various factors beyond our control, including among other things, changes in market conditions affecting the value of loan collateral, the cash flows of our borrowers and problems affecting borrower credit. If we suffer loan losses that exceed our allowance for loans losses, our financial condition, liquidity or results of operations could be materially and adversely affected.

***Our decisions regarding allowance for loan losses and credit risk may materially and adversely affect our business.***

Making loans and other extensions of credit is an essential element of our business. Although we seek to mitigate risks inherent in lending by adhering to specific underwriting practices, our loans and other extensions of credit may not be repaid. The risk of nonpayment is affected by a number of factors, including:

- the duration of the credit;
- credit risks of a particular client;
- changes in economic and industry conditions; and
- in the case of a collateralized loan, risks resulting from uncertainties about the future value of the collateral.

We attempt to maintain an appropriate allowance for loan losses to provide for probable losses in our loan portfolio. We periodically determine the amount of the allowance based on consideration of several factors, including but not limited to:

- an ongoing review of the quality, mix, and size of our overall loan portfolio;
- our historical loan loss experience;
- evaluation of economic conditions;
- regular reviews of loan delinquencies and loan portfolio quality;
- ongoing review of financial information provided by borrowers; and
- the amount and quality of collateral, including guarantees, securing the loans.

The determination of the appropriate level of the allowance for loan losses inherently involves a high degree of subjectivity and requires us to make significant estimates of current credit risks and future trends, all of which may undergo material changes. Continuing deterioration in economic conditions affecting borrowers, new information regarding existing loans, identification of additional problem loans and other factors, both within and outside of our control, may require an increase in the allowance for loan losses. In addition, regulatory agencies periodically review our allowance for loan losses and may require an increase in the provision for loan losses or the recognition of further loan charge-offs, based on judgments different than those of management. In addition, if charge-offs in future periods exceed the allowance for loan losses, we will need additional provisions to increase the allowance for loan losses. Any increases in the allowance for loan losses will result in a decrease in net income and, possibly, capital, and may have a material adverse effect on our financial condition and results of operations.



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### ***A new accounting standard will result in a significant change in how we recognize credit losses and may have a material impact on our financial condition or results of operations.***

In June 2016, the Financial Accounting Standards Board (“FASB”) issued an accounting standard update, “Financial Instruments-Credit Losses (Topic 326), Measurement of Credit Losses on Financial Instruments,” which replaces the current “incurred loss” model for recognizing credit losses with an “expected loss” model referred to as the Current Expected Credit Loss (“CECL”) model. Under the CECL model, we will be required to present certain financial assets carried at amortized cost, such as loans held for investment and held-to-maturity debt securities, at the net amount expected to be collected. The measurement of expected credit losses is to be based on information about past events, including historical experience, current conditions, and reasonable and supportable forecasts that affect the collectability of the reported amount. This measurement will take place at the time the financial asset is first added to the balance sheet and periodically thereafter. This differs significantly from the “incurred loss” model required under current generally accepted accounting principles (“GAAP”), which delays recognition until it is probable a loss has been incurred. Accordingly, we expect that the adoption of the CECL model will materially affect how we determine our allowance for loan losses and could require us to significantly increase our allowance. Moreover, the CECL model may create more volatility in the level of our allowance for loan losses. If we are required to materially increase our level of allowance for loan losses for any reason, such increase could adversely affect our business, financial condition and results of operations.

The new CECL standard will become effective for us on January 1, 2020 and for interim periods within that year. We are currently evaluating the impact the CECL model will have on our accounting, but we expect to recognize a onetime cumulative-effect adjustment to our allowance for loan losses as of the beginning of the first reporting period in which the new standard is effective, consistent with regulatory expectations set forth in interagency guidance issued at the end of 2016. We cannot yet determine the magnitude of any such one-time cumulative adjustment or of the overall impact of the new standard on our business, financial condition and results of operations.

### ***Lack of seasoning of our loan portfolio may increase the risk of credit defaults in the future.***

Due to the growth of the Bank and expansion into new markets over the past several years, a portion of the loans in our loan portfolio and our lending relationships are of relatively recent origin. In general, loans do not begin to show signs of credit deterioration or default until they have been outstanding for some period of time, a process we refer to as “seasoning.” As a result, a portfolio of older loans will usually behave more predictably than a newer portfolio. Because our loan portfolio is relatively new, the current level of delinquencies and defaults may not be representative of the level that will prevail when the portfolio becomes more seasoned, which may be higher than current levels. If delinquencies and defaults increase, we may be required to increase our provision for loan losses, which would adversely affect our results of operations and financial condition.

### ***We rely on other companies to provide key components of our business infrastructure.***

Third parties provide key components of our business operations such as data processing, recording and monitoring transactions, online banking interfaces and services, internet connections and network access. While we have selected these third party vendors carefully, we do not control their actions. Any problem caused by these third parties, including poor performance of services, data breaches, failure to provide services, disruptions in communication services provided by a vendor and failure to handle current or higher volumes, could adversely affect our ability to deliver products and services to our clients and otherwise conduct our business, and may harm our reputation. Financial or operational difficulties of a third party vendor could also hurt our operations if those difficulties interfere with the vendor’s ability to serve us. Replacing these third party vendors could also create significant delay and expense. Accordingly, use of such third parties creates an unavoidable inherent risk to our business operations.

### ***We may be adversely affected by the soundness of other financial institutions.***

Financial services institutions are interrelated as a result of trading, clearing, counterparty, or other relationships. We have exposure to many different industries and counterparties, and routinely execute transactions with counterparties in the financial services industry, including commercial banks, brokers and dealers, investment banks, and other institutional clients. Many of these transactions expose us to credit risk in the event of a default by a counterparty or client. In addition, our credit risk may be exacerbated when the collateral held by the Bank cannot be realized upon or is liquidated at prices not sufficient to recover the full amount of the credit or derivative exposure due to the Bank. Any such losses could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition and results of operations.

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### ***We are subject to losses due to errors, omissions or fraudulent behavior by our employees, clients, counterparties or other third parties.***

We are exposed to many types of operational risk, including the risk of fraud by employees and third parties, clerical recordkeeping errors and transactional errors. Our business is dependent on our employees as well as third-party service providers to process a large number of increasingly complex transactions. We could be materially and adversely affected if employees, clients, counterparties or other third parties caused an operational breakdown or failure, either as a result of human error, fraudulent manipulation or purposeful damage to any of our operations or systems.

In deciding whether to extend credit or to enter into other transactions with clients and counterparties, we may rely on information furnished to us by or on behalf of clients and counterparties, including financial statements and other financial information, which we do not independently verify. We also may rely on representations of clients and counterparties as to the accuracy and completeness of that information and, with respect to financial statements, on reports of independent auditors. For example, in deciding whether to extend credit to clients, we may assume that a client's audited financial statements conform with U.S. GAAP and present fairly, in all material respects, the financial condition, results of operations and cash flows of the client. Our financial condition and results of operations could be negatively affected to the extent we rely on financial statements that do not comply with GAAP or are materially misleading, any of which could be caused by errors, omissions, or fraudulent behavior by our employees, clients, counterparties, or other third parties.

### ***A percentage of the loans in our portfolio currently include exceptions to our loan policies and supervisory guidelines.***

All of the loans that we make are subject to written loan policies adopted by our board of directors and to supervisory guidelines imposed by our regulators. Our loan policies are designed to reduce the risks associated with the loans that we make by requiring our loan officers to take certain steps that vary depending on the type and amount of the loan, prior to closing a loan. These steps include, among other things, making sure the proper liens are documented and perfected on property securing a loan, and requiring proof of adequate insurance coverage on property securing loans. Loans that do not fully comply with our loan policies are known as "exceptions." We categorize exceptions as policy exceptions, financial statement exceptions and document exceptions. As a result of these exceptions, such loans may have a higher risk of loan loss than the other loans in our portfolio that fully comply with our loan policies. In addition, we may be subject to regulatory action by federal or state banking authorities if they believe the number of exceptions in our loan portfolio represents an unsafe banking practice.

### ***Our operational or security systems may experience an interruption or breach in security, including as a result of cyber-attacks.***

We rely heavily on communications and information systems to conduct our business. Any failure, interruption or breach in security of these systems, including as a result of cyber-attacks, could result in failures or disruptions in our client relationship management, deposit, loan, and other systems and also the disclosure or misuse of confidential or proprietary information. While we have systems, policies and procedures designed to prevent or limit the effect of the failure, interruption or security breach of our information systems, there can be no assurance that any such failures, interruptions or security breaches will not occur or, if they do occur, that they will be adequately addressed. The occurrence of any failures, interruptions or security breaches of our information systems could damage our reputation, result in a loss of client business, subject us to additional regulatory scrutiny, or expose us to civil litigation and possible financial liability, any of which could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition and results of operations.

Furthermore, information security risks for financial institutions have generally increased in recent years in part because of the proliferation of new technologies, the use of the Internet and telecommunications technologies to conduct financial transactions, and the increased sophistication and activities of organized crime, hackers, terrorists, activists, and other external parties. Our technologies, systems, networks, and our customers' devices may become the target of cyber-attacks or information security breaches that could result in the unauthorized release, gathering, monitoring, misuse, loss or destruction of our or our customers' confidential, proprietary and other information, or otherwise disrupt our or our customers' or other third parties' business operations. As cyber threats continue to evolve, we may also be required to expend significant additional resources to continue to modify or enhance our protective measures or to investigate and remediate any information security vulnerabilities.

While we have not experienced any material losses relating to cyber-attacks or other information security breaches to date, we may suffer such losses in the future and any information security breach could result in significant costs to us, which may include fines and penalties, potential liabilities from governmental or third party investigations, proceedings or litigation, legal, forensic and consulting fees and expenses, costs and diversion of management attention required for investigation and remediation actions, and the negative impact on our reputation and loss of confidence of our customers and others, any of which could have a material

adverse impact on our business, financial condition and operating results.

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### ***Our controls and procedures may fail or be circumvented.***

We regularly review and update our internal controls, disclosure controls and procedures, and corporate governance policies and procedures. Any system of controls, however well designed and operated, is based in part on certain assumptions and can provide only reasonable, not absolute, assurances that the objectives of the system are met. Any failure or circumvention of our controls and procedures or failure to comply with regulations related to controls and procedures could have a material adverse effect on our business, results of operations and financial condition.

### ***Negative public opinion surrounding the Company and the financial institutions industry generally could damage our reputation and adversely impact our earnings.***

Reputation risk, or the risk to our business, earnings and capital from negative public opinion surrounding the Company and the financial institutions industry generally, is inherent in our business. Negative public opinion can result from our actual or alleged conduct in any number of activities, including lending practices, corporate governance and acquisitions, and from actions taken by government regulators and community organizations in response to those activities. Negative public opinion can adversely affect our ability to keep and attract clients and employees and can expose us to litigation and regulatory action. Although we take steps to minimize reputation risk in dealing with our clients and communities, this risk will always be present given the nature of our business.

### ***Environmental liability associated with commercial lending could result in losses.***

In the course of business, the Bank may acquire, through foreclosure, or deed in lieu of foreclosure, properties securing loans it has originated or purchased which are in default. Particularly in commercial real estate lending, there is a risk that hazardous substances could be discovered on these properties. In this event, the Bank may be required to remove these substances from the affected properties at our sole cost and expense. The cost of this removal could substantially exceed the value of affected properties. We may not have adequate remedies against the prior owner or other responsible parties and could find it difficult or impossible to sell the affected properties. These events could have a material adverse effect on our business, results of operations and financial condition.

### ***Consumers may decide not to use banks to complete their financial transactions.***

Technology and other changes are allowing parties to complete financial transactions through alternative methods that historically have involved banks. For example, consumers can now maintain funds that would have historically been held as bank deposits in brokerage accounts, mutual funds or general-purpose reloadable prepaid cards. Consumers can also complete transactions such as paying bills and/or transferring funds directly without the assistance of banks. The process of eliminating banks as intermediaries, known as "disintermediation," could result in the loss of fee income, as well as the loss of customer deposits and the related income generated from those deposits. The loss of these revenue streams and the lower cost of deposits as a source of funds could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition and results of operations.

### ***Failure to keep pace with technological change could adversely affect our business.***

The financial services industry is continually undergoing rapid technological change with frequent introductions of new technology-driven products and services. The effective use of technology increases efficiency and enables financial institutions to better serve customers and to reduce costs. Our future success depends, in part, upon our ability to address the needs of our customers by using technology to provide products and services that will satisfy customer demands, as well as to create additional efficiencies in our operations. Many of our competitors have substantially greater resources to invest in technological improvements. We may not be able to effectively implement new technology-driven products and services or be successful in marketing these products and services to our customers. Failure to successfully keep pace with technological change affecting the financial services industry could have a material adverse impact on our business and, in turn, our financial condition and results of operations.

### ***New lines of business or new products and services may subject us to additional risk.***

From time to time, we may implement new lines of business or offer new products and services within existing lines of business. There are substantial risks and uncertainties associated with these efforts, particularly in instances where the markets are not fully developed. In developing and marketing new lines of business and/or new products and services, we may invest significant time and resources. Initial timetables for the introduction and development of new lines of business and/or new products or services may

not be achieved and price and profitability targets may not prove feasible. External factors, such as compliance with regulations, competitive alternatives, and shifting market preferences, may also impact the successful implementation of a new line of business and/or a new product or service. Furthermore, any new line of business and/or new product or service could have a significant impact on the effectiveness of our system of internal controls. Failure to successfully manage these risks in the development and implementation of new lines of business and/or new products or services could have a material adverse effect on our business and, in turn, our financial condition and results of operations.



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### ***Our profitability is dependent on our banking activities.***

Because we are a bank holding company, our profitability is directly attributable to the success of the Bank. Our banking activities compete with other banking institutions on the basis of products, service, convenience and price, among others. Due in part to both regulatory changes and consumer demands, banks have experienced increased competition from other entities offering similar products and services. We rely on the profitability of the Bank and dividends received from the Bank for payment of our operating expenses and satisfaction of our obligations. As is the case with other similarly situated financial institutions, our profitability will be subject to the fluctuating cost and availability of funds, changes in the prime lending rate and other interest rates, changes in economic conditions in general, and other factors.

### **Regulatory and Legal Risks**

#### ***We are subject to extensive regulation that could restrict our activities, have an adverse impact on our operations, and impose financial requirements or limitations on the conduct of our business.***

We operate in a highly regulated industry and are subject to examination, supervision, and comprehensive regulation by various regulatory agencies. We are subject to regulation by the Federal Reserve. The Bank is subject to extensive regulation, supervision, and examination by our primary federal regulator, the FDIC, the regulating authority that insures client deposits, and by our primary state regulator, the S.C. Board. Also, as a member of the Federal Home Loan Bank, the Bank must comply with applicable regulations of the Federal Housing Finance Board and the Federal Home Loan Bank. Regulation by these agencies is intended primarily for the protection of our depositors and the deposit insurance fund and not for the benefit of our shareholders. The Bank's activities are also regulated under consumer protection laws applicable to our lending, deposit, and other activities. A sufficient claim against us under these laws could have a material adverse effect on our results of operations.

Further, changes in laws, regulations and regulatory practices affecting the financial services industry could subject us to additional costs, limit the types of financial services and products we may offer and/or increase the ability of non-banks to offer competing financial services and products, among other things. Failure to comply with laws, regulations or policies could also result in heightened regulatory scrutiny and in sanctions by regulatory agencies (such as a memorandum of understanding, a written supervisory agreement or a cease and desist order), civil money penalties and/or reputation damage. Any of these consequences could restrict our ability to expand our business or could require us to raise additional capital or sell assets on terms that are not advantageous to us or our shareholders and could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition and results of operations. While we have policies and procedures designed to prevent any such violations, such violations may occur despite our best efforts.

#### ***Failure to comply with government regulation and supervision could result in sanctions by regulatory agencies, civil money penalties, and damage to our reputation.***

Our operations are subject to extensive regulation by federal, state, and local governmental authorities. Given the recent disruption in the financial markets, we expect that the government will continue to pass new regulations and laws that will impact us. Compliance with such regulations may increase our costs and limit our ability to pursue business opportunities. Failure to comply with laws, regulations, and policies could result in sanctions by regulatory agencies, civil money penalties, and damage to our reputation. While we have policies and procedures in place that are designed to prevent violations of these laws, regulations, and policies, there can be no assurance that such violations will not occur.

#### ***The final Basel III capital rules generally require insured depository institutions and their holding companies to hold more capital, which could adversely affect our financial condition and operations.***

In July 2013, the federal bank regulatory agencies issued a final rule that will revise their risk based capital requirements and the method for calculating risk weighted assets to make them consistent with agreements that were reached by Basel III and certain provisions of the Dodd Frank Act. This rule substantially amended the regulatory risk based capital rules applicable to us. The requirements in the rule began to phase in on January 1, 2015 for the Company and the Bank were fully phased in on January 1, 2019.

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The rule includes certain higher risk-based capital and leverage requirements than those currently in place. Specifically, the following minimum capital requirements apply to us:

- a new common equity Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 4.5%;
- a Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio of 6% (increased from the former 4% requirement);
- a total risk-based capital ratio of 8% (unchanged from the former requirement); and
- a leverage ratio of 4% (also unchanged from the former requirement).

Under the rule, Tier 1 capital is redefined to include two components: Common Equity Tier 1 capital and additional Tier 1 capital. The new and highest form of capital, Common Equity Tier 1 capital, consists solely of common stock (plus related surplus), retained earnings, accumulated other comprehensive income, and limited amounts of minority interests that are in the form of common stock. Additional Tier 1 capital includes other perpetual instruments historically included in Tier 1 capital, such as noncumulative perpetual preferred stock. Tier 2 capital consists of instruments that currently qualify in Tier 2 capital plus instruments that the rule has disqualified from Tier 1 capital treatment. Cumulative perpetual preferred stock, formerly includable in Tier 1 capital, is now included only in Tier 2 capital. Accumulated other comprehensive income (AOCI) is presumptively included in Common Equity Tier 1 capital and often would operate to reduce this category of capital. The rule provided a one-time opportunity at the end of the first quarter of 2015 for covered banking organizations to opt out of much of this treatment of AOCI. We made this opt-out election and, as a result, will retain the pre-existing treatment for AOCI.

In order to avoid restrictions on capital distributions or discretionary bonus payments to executives, a covered banking organization must maintain a "capital conservation buffer" on top of its minimum risk-based capital requirements. This buffer must consist solely of Tier 1 Common Equity, but the buffer applies to all three measurements (Common Equity Tier 1, Tier 1 capital and total capital). The 2.5% capital conservation buffer was phased in incrementally over time, becoming fully effective on January 1, 2019.

In general, the rules have had the effect of increasing capital requirements by increasing the risk weights on certain assets, including high volatility commercial real estate, certain loans past due 90 days or more or in nonaccrual status, mortgage servicing rights not includable in Common Equity Tier 1 capital, equity exposures, and claims on securities firms, that are used in the denominator of the three risk-based capital ratios.

In addition, in the current economic and regulatory environment, bank regulators may impose capital requirements that are more stringent than those required by applicable existing regulations. The application of more stringent capital requirements for us could, among other things, result in lower returns on equity, require the raising of additional capital, and result in regulatory actions if we are unable to comply with such requirements. Implementation of changes to asset risk weightings for risk based capital calculations, items included or deducted in calculating regulatory capital or additional capital conservation buffers, could result in management modifying our business strategy and could limit our ability to make distributions, including paying dividends or buying back our shares.

### ***Higher FDIC deposit insurance premiums and assessments could adversely affect our financial condition.***

Our deposits are insured up to applicable limits by the Deposit Insurance Fund of the FDIC and are subject to deposit insurance assessments to maintain deposit insurance. As an FDIC-insured institution, we are required to pay quarterly deposit insurance premium assessments to the FDIC. Although we cannot predict what the insurance assessment rates will be in the future, either deterioration in our risk-based capital ratios or adjustments to the base assessment rates could have a material adverse impact on our business, financial condition, results of operations, and cash flows.

### ***We face a risk of noncompliance and enforcement action with the Bank Secrecy Act and other anti-money laundering statutes and regulations.***

The federal Bank Secrecy Act, the USA Patriot Act and other laws and regulations require financial institutions, among other duties, to institute and maintain effective anti-money laundering programs and file suspicious activity and currency transaction reports as appropriate. The federal Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, established by the U.S. Treasury to administer the Bank Secrecy Act, is authorized to impose significant civil money penalties for violations of those requirements and has recently engaged in coordinated enforcement efforts with the individual federal banking regulators, as well as the U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration and Internal Revenue Service. There is also increased scrutiny of compliance with the rules enforced by OFAC. Federal and state bank regulators also have begun to focus on compliance with Bank Secrecy Act and anti-money laundering regulations. If our policies, procedures and systems are deemed deficient or the policies, procedures and systems of the financial institutions that we have already acquired or may acquire in the future are deficient, we would be subject to liability, including fines and regulatory actions such as restrictions on our ability to pay dividends and the necessity to obtain regulatory

approvals to proceed with certain aspects of our business plan, including our acquisition plans, which would negatively affect our business, financial condition and results of operations. Failure to maintain and implement adequate programs to combat money laundering and terrorist financing could also have serious reputational consequences for us.

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### ***Federal, state and local consumer lending laws may restrict our ability to originate certain mortgage loans or increase our risk of liability with respect to such loans and could increase our cost of doing business.***

Federal, state and local laws have been adopted that are intended to eliminate certain lending practices considered “predatory.” These laws prohibit practices such as steering borrowers away from more affordable products, selling unnecessary insurance to borrowers, repeatedly refinancing loans and making loans without a reasonable expectation that the borrowers will be able to repay the loans irrespective of the value of the underlying property. Loans with certain terms and conditions and that otherwise meet the definition of a “qualified mortgage” may be protected from liability to a borrower for failing to make the necessary determinations. In either case, we may find it necessary to tighten our mortgage loan underwriting standards in response to the CFPB rules, which may constrain our ability to make loans consistent with our business strategies. It is our policy not to make predatory loans and to determine borrowers' ability to repay, but the law and related rules create the potential for increased liability with respect to our lending and loan investment activities. They increase our cost of doing business and, ultimately, may prevent us from making certain loans and cause us to reduce the average percentage rate or the points and fees on loans that we do make.

### ***We are subject to federal and state fair lending laws, and failure to comply with these laws could lead to material penalties.***

Federal and state fair lending laws and regulations, such as the Equal Credit Opportunity Act and the Fair Housing Act, impose nondiscriminatory lending requirements on financial institutions. The Department of Justice, CFPB and other federal and state agencies are responsible for enforcing these laws and regulations. Private parties may also have the ability to challenge an institution's performance under fair lending laws in private class action litigation. A successful challenge to our performance under the fair lending laws and regulations could adversely impact our rating under the Community Reinvestment Act and result in a wide variety of sanctions, including the required payment of damages and civil money penalties, injunctive relief, imposition of restrictions on merger and acquisition activity and restrictions on expansion activity, which could negatively affect our reputation, business, financial condition and results of operations.

### ***The Federal Reserve may require us to commit capital resources to support the Bank.***

The Federal Reserve requires a bank holding company to act as a source of financial and managerial strength to a subsidiary bank and to commit resources to support such subsidiary bank. Under the “source of strength” doctrine, the Federal Reserve may require a bank holding company to make capital injections into a troubled subsidiary bank and may charge the bank holding company with engaging in unsafe and unsound practices for failure to commit resources to such a subsidiary bank. In addition, the Dodd-Frank Act directs the federal bank regulators to require that all companies that directly or indirectly control an insured depository institution serve as a source of strength for the institution. Under these requirements, in the future, we could be required to provide financial assistance to the Bank if the Bank experiences financial distress.

A capital injection may be required at times when we do not have the resources to provide it, and therefore we may be required to borrow the funds. In the event of a bank holding company's bankruptcy, the bankruptcy trustee will assume any commitment by the holding company to a federal bank regulatory agency to maintain the capital of a subsidiary bank. Moreover, bankruptcy law provides that claims based on any such commitment will be entitled to a priority of payment over the claims of the holding company's general unsecured creditors, including the holders of its note obligations. Thus, any borrowing that must be done by the holding company in order to make the required capital injection becomes more difficult and expensive and will adversely impact the holding company's cash flows, financial condition, results of operations and prospects.

### ***We may be subject to claims and litigation asserting lender liability.***

From time to time, clients and others make claims and take legal action pertaining to our performance of fiduciary responsibilities. These claims are often referred to as “lender liability” claims and are sometimes brought in an effort to produce or increase leverage against us in workout negotiations or debt collection proceedings. Lender liability claims frequently assert one or more of the following allegations: breach of fiduciary duties, fraud, economic duress, breach of contract, breach of the implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing, and similar claims. Whether customer claims and legal action related to the performance of our responsibilities are founded or unfounded, if such claims and legal actions are not resolved in a favorable manner, they may result in significant financial liability and/or adversely affect our market reputation, products and services, as well as potentially affecting customer demand for those products and services. Any financial liability or reputation damage could have a material adverse effect on our business, which, in turn, could have a material adverse effect on our financial condition, results of operations and liquidity.

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### ***There is uncertainty surrounding the potential legal, regulatory and policy changes by the current presidential administration in the U.S. that may directly affect financial institutions and the global economy.***

The current presidential administration has indicated that it would like to see changes made to certain financial reform regulations, including the Dodd-Frank Act, which has resulted in increased regulatory uncertainty, and we are assessing the potential impact on financial and economic markets and on our business. Changes in federal policy and at regulatory agencies are expected to occur over time through policy and personnel changes, which could lead to changes involving the level of oversight and focus on the financial services industry. The nature, timing and economic and political effects of potential changes to the current legal and regulatory framework affecting financial institutions remain highly uncertain. At this time, it is unclear what laws, regulations and policies may change and whether future changes or uncertainty surrounding future changes will adversely affect our operating environment and, therefore, our business, financial condition and results of operations.

### **Risks Related to Our Common Stock**

#### ***Our ability to pay cash dividends is limited, and we may be unable to pay future dividends even if we desire to do so.***

The Federal Reserve has issued a policy statement regarding the payment of dividends by bank holding companies. In general, the Federal Reserve's policies provide that dividends should be paid only out of current earnings and only if the prospective rate of earnings retention by the bank holding company appears consistent with the organization's capital needs, asset quality and overall financial condition. The Federal Reserve's policies also require that a bank holding company serve as a source of financial strength to its subsidiary banks by standing ready to use available resources to provide adequate capital funds to those banks during periods of financial stress or adversity and by maintaining the financial flexibility and capital-raising capacity to obtain additional resources for assisting its subsidiary banks where necessary. Further, under the prompt corrective action regulations, the ability of a bank holding company to pay dividends may be restricted if a subsidiary bank becomes undercapitalized. These regulatory policies could affect the ability of the Company to pay dividends or otherwise engage in capital distributions.

Statutory and regulatory limitations apply to the Bank's payment of dividends to the Company. As a South Carolina chartered bank, the Bank is subject to limitations on the amount of dividends that it is permitted to pay. Unless otherwise instructed by the S.C. Board, the Bank is generally permitted under South Carolina state banking regulations to pay cash dividends of up to 100% of net income in any calendar year without obtaining the prior approval of the S.C. Board. The FDIC also has the authority under federal law to enjoin a bank from engaging in what in its opinion constitutes an unsafe or unsound practice in conducting its business, including the payment of a dividend under certain circumstances. If the Bank is not permitted to pay cash dividends to the Company, it is unlikely that we would be able to pay cash dividends on our common stock. Moreover, holders of our common stock are entitled to receive dividends only when, and if declared by our board of directors.

#### ***Our stock price may be volatile, which could result in losses to our investors and litigation against us.***

Our stock price has been volatile in the past and several factors could cause the price to fluctuate substantially in the future. These factors include but are not limited to: actual or anticipated variations in earnings, changes in analysts' recommendations or projections, our announcement of developments related to our businesses, operations and stock performance of other companies deemed to be peers, new technology used or services offered by traditional and non-traditional competitors, news reports of trends, irrational exuberance on the part of investors, new federal banking regulations, and other issues related to the financial services industry. Our stock price may fluctuate significantly in the future, and these fluctuations may be unrelated to our performance. General market declines or market volatility in the future, especially in the financial institutions sector, could adversely affect the price of our common stock, and the current market price may not be indicative of future market prices. Stock price volatility may make it more difficult for you to resell your common stock when you want and at prices you find attractive. Moreover, in the past, securities class action lawsuits have been instituted against some companies following periods of volatility in the market price of its securities. We could in the future be the target of similar litigation. Securities litigation could result in substantial costs and divert management's attention and resources from our normal business.

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***Future sales of our stock by our shareholders or the perception that those sales could occur may cause our stock price to decline.***

Although our common stock is listed for trading on The NASDAQ Global Market, the trading volume in our common stock is lower than that of other larger financial services companies. A public trading market having the desired characteristics of depth, liquidity and orderliness depends on the presence in the marketplace of willing buyers and sellers of our common stock at any given time. This presence depends on the individual decisions of investors and general economic and market conditions over which we have no control. Given the relatively low trading volume of our common stock, significant sales of our common stock in the public market, or the perception that those sales may occur, could cause the trading price of our common stock to decline or to be lower than it otherwise might be in the absence of those sales or perceptions.

***Economic and other circumstances may require us to raise capital at times or in amounts that are unfavorable to us. If we have to issue shares of common stock, they will dilute the percentage ownership interest of existing shareholders and may dilute the book value per share of our common stock and adversely affect the terms on which we may obtain additional capital.***

We may need to incur additional debt or equity financing in the future to make strategic acquisitions or investments or to strengthen our capital position. Our ability to raise additional capital, if needed, will depend on, among other things, conditions in the capital markets at that time, which are outside of our control and our financial performance. We cannot provide assurance that such financing will be available to us on acceptable terms or at all, or if we do raise additional capital that it will not be dilutive to existing shareholders.

If we determine, for any reason, that we need to raise capital, subject to applicable NASDAQ rules, our board generally has the authority, without action by or vote of the shareholders, to issue all or part of any authorized but unissued shares of stock for any corporate purpose, including issuance of equity-based incentives under or outside of our equity compensation plans. Additionally, we are not restricted from issuing additional common stock or preferred stock, including any securities that are convertible into or exchangeable for, or that represent the right to receive, common stock or preferred stock or any substantially similar securities. The market price of our common stock could decline as a result of sales by us of a large number of shares of common stock or preferred stock or similar securities in the market or from the perception that such sales could occur. If we issue preferred stock that has a preference over the common stock with respect to the payment of dividends or upon liquidation, dissolution or winding-up, or if we issue preferred stock with voting rights that dilute the voting power of the common stock, the rights of holders of the common stock or the market price of our common stock could be adversely affected. Any issuance of additional shares of stock will dilute the percentage ownership interest of our shareholders and may dilute the book value per share of our common stock. Shares we issue in connection with any such offering will increase the total number of shares and may dilute the economic and voting ownership interest of our existing shareholders.

***Provisions of our articles of incorporation and bylaws, South Carolina law, and state and federal banking regulations, could delay or prevent a takeover by a third party.***

Our articles of incorporation and bylaws could delay, defer, or prevent a third party takeover, despite possible benefit to the shareholders, or otherwise adversely affect the price of our common stock. Our governing documents:

authorize a class of preferred stock that may be issued in series with terms, including voting rights, established by the board of directors without shareholder approval;

authorize 10,000,000 shares of common stock and 10,000,000 shares of preferred stock that may be issued by the board of directors without shareholder approval;

classify our board with staggered three year terms, preventing a change in a majority of the board at any annual meeting;

require advance notice of proposed nominations for election to the board of directors and business to be conducted at a shareholder meeting;

grant the board of directors the discretion, when considering whether a proposed merger or similar transaction is in the best interests of the Company and our shareholders, to take into account the effect of the transaction on the employees, clients and suppliers of the Company and upon the communities in which offices of the Company are located, to the extent permitted by South Carolina law;

provide that the number of directors shall be fixed from time to time by resolution adopted by a majority of the directors then in office, but may not consist of fewer than five nor more than 25 members; and

provide that no individual who is or becomes a "business competitor" or who is or becomes affiliated with, employed by, or a representative of any individual, corporation, or other entity which the board of directors, after having such matter formally brought to its attention, determines to be in competition with us or any of our subsidiaries (any such individual, corporation, or other entity

being a "business competitor") shall be eligible to serve as a director if the board of directors determines that it would not be in our best interests for such individual to serve as a director (any financial institution having branches or affiliates within Greenville County, South Carolina is presumed to be a business competitor unless the board of directors determines otherwise).

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In addition, the South Carolina business combinations statute provides that a 10% or greater shareholder of a resident domestic corporation cannot engage in a "business combination" (as defined in the statute) with such corporation for a period of two years following the date on which the 10% shareholder became such, unless the business combination or the acquisition of shares is approved by a majority of the disinterested members of such corporation's board of directors before the 10% shareholder's share acquisition date. This statute further provides that at no time (even after the two-year period subsequent to such share acquisition date) may the 10% shareholder engage in a business combination with the relevant corporation unless certain approvals of the board of directors or disinterested shareholders are obtained or unless the consideration given in the combination meets certain minimum standards set forth in the statute. The law is very broad in its scope and is designed to inhibit unfriendly acquisitions but it does not apply to corporations whose articles of incorporation contain a provision electing not to be covered by the law. Our articles of incorporation do not contain such a provision. An amendment of our articles of incorporation to that effect would, however, permit a business combination with an interested shareholder even though that status was obtained prior to the amendment.

Finally, the Change in Bank Control Act and the Bank Holding Company Act generally require filings and approvals prior to certain transactions that would result in a party acquiring control of the Company or the Bank.

### ***Our common stock is not an insured deposit and is not guaranteed by the FDIC.***

Shares of our common stock are not a bank deposit and, therefore, losses in value are not insured by the FDIC, any other deposit insurance fund or by any other public or private entity. Investment in shares of our common stock is inherently risky for the reasons described herein and our shareholders will bear the risk of loss if the value or market price of our common stock is adversely affected.

### **Item 1B. Unresolved Staff Comments.**

None.

### **Item 2. Properties.**

Our principal executive offices and the Bank's main office is located at 100 Verdae Boulevard, Suite 100, Greenville, South Carolina 29607. In addition, we currently operate nine additional offices located in Greenville, Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina, one office in Raleigh, North Carolina, one office in Greensboro, North Carolina, and one office in Atlanta, Georgia. We lease five of our offices and own the remaining eight locations. Management believes the terms of the various leases are consistent with market standards and were arrived at through arm's-length bargaining.

### **Item 3. Legal Proceedings.**

In the ordinary course of operations, we may be a party to various legal proceedings from time to time. We do not believe that there is any pending or threatened proceeding against us, which, if determined adversely, would have a material effect on our business, results of operations, or financial condition.

### **Item 4. Mine Safety Disclosures.**

None.

## **PART II**

### **Item 5. Market for Common Equity, Related Shareholder Matters and Issuer Purchases of Equity Securities.**

#### **Market Information and Holders of Record**

Our common stock is currently traded on the NASDAQ Global Market under the symbol "SFST." We had approximately 1,900 shareholders of record on February 22, 2019.



**Table of Contents****Dividends**

We have not declared or paid any cash dividends on our common stock since our inception. For the foreseeable future, we do not intend to declare cash dividends. We intend to retain earnings to grow our business and strengthen our capital base. Our ability to pay cash dividends depends primarily on the ability of our subsidiary, the Bank to pay dividends to us. As a South Carolina chartered bank, the Bank is subject to limitations on the amount of dividends that it is permitted to pay. Unless otherwise instructed by the S.C. Board, the Bank is generally permitted under South Carolina state banking regulations to pay cash dividends of up to 100% of net income in any calendar year without obtaining the prior approval of the S.C. Board. The FDIC also has the authority under federal law to enjoin a bank from engaging in what in its opinion constitutes an unsafe or unsound practice in conducting its business, including the payment of a dividend under certain circumstances.

**Equity Compensation Plan Information**

The following table sets forth equity compensation plan information at December 31, 2018. The number of shares and the exercise prices for options and warrants has been adjusted for the 3 for 2 stock split in 2003 and the subsequent 10% stock dividends in 2006, 2011, 2012, and 2013.

<b>Plan Category</b>	<b>Number of securities to be issued upon exercise of outstanding options, warrants and rights (a)</b>	<b>Weighted-average exercise price of outstanding options, warrants and rights (b)</b>	<b>Number of securities remaining available for future issuance under equity compensation plans (c) (excluding securities reflected in column(a))</b>
Equity compensation plans approved by security holders			
2000 Stock options (1)	139,691	\$ 5.74	-
2010 Stock Incentive Plan – options	363,460	18.73	14,375
2010 Stock Incentive Plan – restricted stock	-	-	-
2016 Equity Incentive Plan – options	143,660	40.27	255,715
2016 Equity Incentive Plan – restricted stock	-	-	46,424
Total	646,811	\$ 20.71	316,514

(1) Under the terms of the 2000 Plan no further incentive stock option awards may be granted, effective March 2010; however, the Plan will remain in effect until all awards have been exercised or forfeited and we determine to terminate the Plan. As of March 2010, any options that expire or are forfeited are eligible to be reissued as non-qualified stock option awards.

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**Stock Performance Graph**

The performance graph below compares the Company's cumulative total return over the most recent five-year period with the SNL Southeast Bank Index, a banking industry performance index for the southeastern United States, and the Russell 2000 Index, a small-cap stock market index which the Company was added to in June 2016. Returns are shown on a total return basis, assuming the reinvestment of dividends and a beginning stock index value of \$100 per share.

	<b>Period Ending</b>					
	<b>12/31/2013</b>	<b>12/31/2014</b>	<b>12/31/2015</b>	<b>12/31/2016</b>	<b>12/31/2017</b>	<b>12/31/2018</b>
Southern First Bancshares	\$100.00	128.16	170.93	271.08	310.62	241.49
SNL Southeast Bank Index	\$100.00	112.63	110.87	147.18	182.06	150.42
Russell 2000 Index	\$100.00	104.89	100.26	121.63	139.44	124.09

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**Table of Contents****Item 6. Selected Financial Data**

The following table sets forth our selected historical consolidated financial information for the periods and as of the dates indicated. We derived our balance sheet and income statement data for the years ended December 31, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015 and 2014 from our audited consolidated financial statements. You should read this information together with "Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations" and our audited consolidated financial statements and the related notes thereto, which are included elsewhere in this Annual Report on Form 10-K.

(dollars in thousands, except per share data)	<b>Years Ended December 31,</b>				
	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>BALANCE SHEET DATA</b>					
Total assets	\$ 1,900,614	1,624,625	1,340,908	1,217,293	1,029,865
Investment securities	79,026	72,065	70,222	95,471	61,546
Loans (1)	1,677,332	1,387,070	1,163,644	1,004,944	871,446
Allowance for loan losses	15,762	15,523	14,855	13,629	11,752
Deposits	1,648,136	1,381,123	1,091,151	985,733	788,907
FHLB advances and other borrowings	50,000	67,200	115,200	115,200	135,200
Junior subordinated debentures	13,403	13,403	13,403	13,403	13,403
Common equity	173,916	149,686	109,872	94,240	82,992
Preferred stock	-	-	-	-	-
Shareholders' equity	173,916	149,686	109,872	94,240	82,992
<b>SELECTED RESULTS OF OPERATIONS DATA</b>					
Interest income	\$ 76,657	61,209	51,191	46,030	39,948
Interest expense	16,505	10,333	8,192	7,501	6,908
Net interest income	60,152	50,876	42,999	38,529	33,040
Provision for loan losses	1,900	2,000	2,300	3,200	4,175
Net interest income after provision for loan losses	58,252	48,876	40,699	35,329	28,865
Noninterest income	10,201	9,337	10,846	8,416	5,780
Noninterest expenses	39,763	34,552	31,176	28,209	24,907
Income before income tax expense	28,690	23,661	20,369	15,536	9,738
Income tax expense	6,401	10,616	7,333	5,369	3,113
Net income	22,289	13,045	13,036	10,167	6,625
Preferred stock dividends	-	-	-	-	915
Net income available to common shareholders	\$ 22,289	13,045	13,036	10,167	5,710
<b>PER COMMON SHARE DATA</b>					
Basic	\$ 3.02	1.86	2.06	1.64	1.15
Diluted	2.88	1.76	1.94	1.55	1.10
Book value	23.29	20.37	17.00	14.98	13.34
Weighted average number of common shares outstanding:					
Basic, in thousands	7,384	7,006	6,318	6,205	4,981
Diluted, in thousands	7,737	7,393	6,721	6,561	5,201
<b>SELECTED FINANCIAL RATIOS</b>					
<b>Performance Ratios:</b>					
Return on average assets	1.27%	0.87%	1.04%	0.90%	0.69%
Return on average equity	13.83%	9.66%	12.73%	11.42%	8.92%
Return on average common equity	13.83%	9.66%	12.73%	11.42%	12.03%
Net interest margin, tax equivalent(2)	3.58%	3.57%	3.63%	3.63%	3.68%
Efficiency ratio (3)	56.52%	57.38%	57.90%	60.09%	64.16%
<b>Asset Quality Ratios:</b>					
Nonperforming assets to total loans (1)	0.35%	0.54%	0.53%	0.90%	1.14%
Nonperforming assets to total assets	0.31%	0.46%	0.46%	0.75%	0.97%
Net charge-offs to average total loans	0.11%	0.10%	0.10%	0.14%	0.33%
Allowance for loan losses to nonperforming loans	270.36%	212.60%	270.95%	205.98%	176.72%
Allowance for loan losses to total loans	0.94%	1.12%	1.28%	1.36%	1.35%
<b>Holding Company Capital Ratios:</b>					
Total risk-based capital ratio	12.49%	13.27%	12.11%	11.95%	12.51%
Tier 1 risk-based capital ratio	11.53%	12.11%	10.86%	10.70%	11.25%
Leverage ratio	10.14%	10.26%	9.42%	8.78%	9.52%
Common equity tier 1 ratio(4)	10.73%	11.15%	9.71%	9.40%	7.76%
Tangible common equity(5)	9.15%	9.21%	8.19%	7.74%	8.06%
<b>Growth Ratios:</b>					
Change in assets	16.99%	21.16%	10.15%	18.20%	15.61%
Change in loans	20.93%	19.20%	15.79%	15.32%	18.78%

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Change in deposits	19.33%	26.57%	10.69%	24.95%	15.96%
Change in net income to common shareholders	70.86%	0.07%	28.22%	78.06%	30.69%
Change in earnings per common share - diluted	63.64%	-9.28%	25.16%	40.91%	12.24%

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Footnotes to table:

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|-----|--|
| (1) | Excludes loans held for sale.<br>The tax-equivalent adjustment to net interest income adjusts the yield for assets earning tax-exempt income to a comparable yield on a taxable basis. |
| (2) | Noninterest expense divided by the sum of net interest income and noninterest income.  |
| (3) | The common equity tier 1 ratio is calculated as the sum of common equity divided by risk-weighted assets.  |
| (4) | The common equity ratio is calculated as total equity less preferred stock divided by total assets.  |
| (5) |  |

**Item 7. Management’s Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations**

The following discussion and analysis also identifies significant factors that have affected our financial position and operating results during the periods included in the accompanying financial statements. We encourage you to read this discussion and analysis in conjunction with the financial statements and the related notes and the other statistical information also included in this Annual Report on Form 10-K.

**OVERVIEW**

Our business model continues to be client-focused, utilizing relationship teams to provide our clients with a specific banker contact and support team responsible for all of their banking needs. The purpose of this structure is to provide a consistent and superior level of professional service, and we believe it provides us with a distinct competitive advantage. We consider exceptional client service to be a critical part of our culture, which we refer to as "ClientFIRST."

At December 31, 2018, we had total assets of \$1.90 billion, a 17.0% increase from total assets of \$1.62 billion at December 31, 2017. The largest components of our total assets are loans and securities which were \$1.68 billion and \$79.0 million, respectively, at December 31, 2018. Comparatively, our loans and securities totaled \$1.39 billion and \$72.1 million, respectively, at December 31, 2017. Our liabilities and shareholders’ equity at December 31, 2018 totaled \$1.73 billion and \$173.9 million, respectively, compared to liabilities of \$1.47 billion and shareholders’ equity of \$149.7 million at December 31, 2017. The principal component of our liabilities is deposits which were \$1.65 billion and \$1.38 billion at December 31, 2018 and 2017, respectively.

Like most community banks, we derive the majority of our income from interest received on our loans and investments. Our primary source of funds for making these loans and investments is our deposits, on which we pay interest. Consequently, one of the key measures of our success is our amount of net interest income, or the difference between the income on our interest-earning assets, such as loans and investments, and the expense on our interest-bearing liabilities, such as deposits and borrowings. Another key measure is the difference between the yield we earn on these interest-earning assets and the rate we pay on our interest-bearing liabilities, which is called our net interest spread. In addition to earning interest on our loans and investments, we earn income through fees and other charges to our clients.

Our net income available to common shareholders for the years ended December 31, 2018 and 2017 was \$22.3 million and \$13.0 million, or diluted earnings per share (“EPS”) of \$2.88 and \$1.76 for the years ended December 31, 2018 and 2017, respectively. The increase in net income resulted primarily from increases in net interest income and noninterest income and a decrease in income tax expense, partially offset by an increase in noninterest expense. In addition, our net income available to shareholders was \$13.0 million during the year ended December 31, 2016.

Economic conditions, competition, and the monetary and fiscal policies of the federal government significantly affect most financial institutions, including the Bank. Lending and deposit activities and fee income generation are influenced by levels of business spending and investment, consumer income, consumer spending and savings, capital market activities, and competition among financial institutions, as well as client preferences, interest rate conditions and prevailing market rates on competing products in our market areas.

**CRITICAL ACCOUNTING POLICIES**

We have adopted various accounting policies that govern the application of accounting principles generally accepted in the U.S. and with general practices within the banking industry in the preparation of our financial statements. Our significant accounting

policies are described in Note 1 to our Consolidated Financial Statements as of December 31, 2018.

Certain accounting policies involve significant judgments and assumptions by us that have a material impact on the carrying value of certain assets and liabilities. We consider these accounting policies to be critical accounting policies. The judgment and assumptions we use are based on historical experience and other factors, which we believe to be reasonable under the circumstances. Because of the nature of the judgment and assumptions we make, actual results could differ from these judgments and estimates that could have a material impact on the carrying values of our assets and liabilities and our results of operations. Management has reviewed and approved these critical accounting policies and has discussed these policies with the Company's Audit Committee.

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### ***Allowance for Loan Losses***

The allowance for loan loss is management's estimate of credit losses inherent in the loan portfolio. The allowance for loan losses is established as losses are estimated to have occurred through a provision for loan losses charged to earnings. Loan losses are charged against the allowance when management believes the uncollectibility of a loan balance is confirmed. Subsequent recoveries, if any, are credited to the allowance. The allowance for loan losses is evaluated on a regular basis by management and is based upon management's periodic review of the collectability of the loans in light of historical experience, the nature and volume of the loan portfolio, adverse situations that may affect the borrower's ability to repay, estimated value of any underlying collateral and prevailing economic conditions. This evaluation is inherently subjective as it requires estimates that are susceptible to significant revision as more information becomes available.

We have an established process to determine the adequacy of the allowance for loan losses that assesses the losses inherent in our portfolio. While we attribute portions of the allowance to specific portfolio segments, the entire allowance is available to absorb credit losses inherent in the total loan portfolio. Our process involves procedures to appropriately consider the unique risk characteristics of our commercial and consumer loan portfolio segments. For each portfolio segment, impairment is measured individually for each impaired loan. Our allowance levels are influenced by loan volume, loan grade or delinquency status, historic loss experience and other economic conditions.

The allowance consists of general and specific components.

Commercial loans are assessed for estimated losses by grading each loan using various risk factors identified through periodic reviews. We apply historic grade-specific loss factors to each loan class. In the development of our statistically derived loan grade loss factors, we observe historical losses over 20 quarters for each loan grade. These loss estimates are adjusted as appropriate based on additional analysis of external loss data or other risks identified from current economic conditions and credit quality trends. For consumer loans, we determine the allowance on a collective basis utilizing historical losses over 20 quarters to represent our best estimate of inherent loss. We pool loans, generally by loan class with similar risk characteristics.

Included in the general component of the allowance for loan losses for both portfolio segments is a margin of imprecision inherent in the underlying assumptions used in the methodologies for estimating general losses in the portfolio. Uncertainties and subjective issues such as changes in the lending policies and procedures, changes in the local/national economy, changes in volume or type of credits, changes in volume/severity or problem loans, quality of loan review and board of director oversight, concentrations of credit, and peer group comparisons are qualitative and environmental factors considered.

The specific component relates to loans that are classified as impaired. For loans that are classified as impaired, an allowance is established when the value of the impaired loan is lower than the carrying value of that loan. A loan is considered impaired when, based on current information and events, it is probable that the Company will be unable to collect the scheduled payments of principal or interest when due according to the contractual terms of the loan agreement. Factors considered by management in determining impairment include payment status, collateral value, and the probability of collecting scheduled principal and interest payments when due. Impairment is measured on a loan by loan basis for commercial and consumer loans by either the present value of expected future cash flows discounted at the loan's effective interest rate, the loan's obtainable market price, or the fair value of the collateral if the loan is collateral dependent. The specific component also includes an amount for the estimated impairment on commercial and consumer loans modified in a troubled debt restructuring ("TDR"), whether on accrual or nonaccrual status.

While management uses available information to recognize losses on loans, future additions to the allowance may be necessary based on changes in local economic conditions. In addition, regulatory agencies, as an integral part of their examination process, periodically review our allowance for loan losses. Such agencies may require us to recognize additions to the allowances based on their judgments about information available to them at the time of their examination.

### ***Derivatives***

Derivative instruments are used in relation to our mortgage banking activities and require significant judgment and estimates in determining their fair value. We hold derivative instruments, which consist of rate lock agreements related to expected funding of fixed-rate mortgage loans to customers ("interest rate lock commitments") and forward commitments to sell mortgage-backed securities and individual fixed-rate mortgage loans ("forward commitments"). Our objective in obtaining the forward commitments is to mitigate the interest rate risk associated with the interest rate lock commitments and the mortgage loans that are held for sale. Derivatives related to these commitments are recorded as either a derivative asset or a derivative liability in the balance sheet and are measured at fair value. Both the interest rate lock commitments and the forward commitments are reported at fair value, with

adjustments recorded in current period earnings in mortgage banking within the noninterest income section of the consolidated statements of income.

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### ***Fair Valuation of Financial Instruments***

We use fair value measurements to record fair value adjustments to certain financial instruments and to determine fair value disclosures. Additionally, we may be required to record other assets at fair value on a nonrecurring basis. These nonrecurring fair value adjustments typically involve application of lower-of-cost-or-market accounting or write-downs of individual assets. Further, we include in the Notes to the Consolidated Financial Statements information about the extent to which fair value is used to measure assets and liabilities, the valuation methodologies used, and the related impact to income. Additionally, for financial instruments not recorded at fair value, we disclose the estimate of their fair value.

Fair value is defined as the exchange price that would be received to sell an asset or paid to transfer the liability in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date. Accounting standards establish a three-level hierarchy for disclosure of assets and liabilities recorded at fair value. The classification of assets and liabilities within the hierarchy is based on whether the inputs to the valuation methodology used for measurement are observable or unobservable. Observable inputs reflect market-derived or market-based information obtained from independent sources, while unobservable inputs reflect our estimates about market data. The three levels of inputs that are used to classify fair value measurements are as follows:

Level 1 — Valuation is based upon quoted prices for identical instruments traded in active markets. Level 1 instruments generally include securities traded on active exchange markets, such as the New York Stock Exchange, as well as securities that are traded by dealers or brokers in active over-the-counter markets. Instruments we classify as Level 1 are instruments that have been priced directly from dealer trading desks and represent actual prices at which such securities have traded within active markets.

Level 2 — Valuation is based upon quoted prices for similar instruments in active markets, quoted prices for identical or similar instruments in markets that are not active, and model-based valuation techniques, such as matrix pricing, for which all significant assumptions are observable in the market. Instruments we classify as Level 2 include securities that are valued based on pricing models that use relevant observable information generated by transactions that have occurred in the market place that involve similar securities.

Level 3 — Valuation is generated from model-based techniques that use significant assumptions not observable in the market. These unobservable assumptions reflect the Company's estimates of assumptions market participants would use in pricing the asset or liability. Valuation techniques include use of option pricing models, discounted cash flow models, and similar techniques.

We attempt to maximize the use of observable inputs and minimize the use of unobservable inputs when developing fair value measurements. When available, we use quoted market prices to measure fair value. Specifically, we use independent pricing services to obtain fair values based on quoted prices. Quoted prices are subject to our internal price verification procedures. If market prices are not available, fair value measurement is based upon models that use primarily market-based or independently-sourced market parameters. Most of our financial instruments use either of the foregoing methodologies, collectively Level 1 and Level 2 measurements, to determine fair value adjustments recorded to our financial statements. However, in certain cases, when market observable inputs for model-based valuation techniques may not be readily available, we are required to make judgments about assumptions market participants would use in estimating the fair value of the financial instrument.

The degree of management judgment involved in determining the fair value of an instrument is dependent upon the availability of quoted market prices or observable market parameters. For instruments that trade actively and have quoted market prices or observable market parameters, there is minimal subjectivity involved in measuring fair value. When observable market prices and parameters are not fully available, management's judgment is necessary to estimate fair value. In addition, changes in market conditions may reduce the availability of quoted prices or observable data. For example, reduced liquidity in the capital markets or changes in secondary market activities could result in observable market inputs becoming unavailable. When significant adjustments are required to available observable inputs, it may be appropriate to utilize an estimate based primarily on unobservable inputs. When an active market for a security does not exist, the use of management estimates that incorporate current market participant expectations of future cash flows, and include appropriate risk premiums, is acceptable.

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Significant judgment may be required to determine whether certain assets measured at fair value are included in Level 2 or Level 3. If fair value measurement is based upon recent observable market activity of such assets or comparable assets (other than forced or distressed transactions) that occur in sufficient volume and do not require significant adjustment using unobservable inputs, those assets are classified as Level 2. If not, they are classified as Level 3. Making this assessment requires significant judgment.

***Other-Than-Temporary Impairment Analysis***

Our debt securities are classified as securities available for sale and reported at fair value. Unrealized gains and losses, after applicable taxes, are reported in shareholders' equity. We conduct other-than-temporary impairment ("OTTI") analysis on a quarterly basis or more often if a potential loss-triggering event occurs. The initial indicator of OTTI for debt securities is a decline in market value below the amount recorded for an investment and the severity and duration of the decline. For a debt security for which there has been a decline in the fair value below amortized cost basis, we recognize OTTI if we (1) have the intent to sell the security, (2) it is more likely than not that we will be required to sell the security before recovery of its amortized cost basis, or (3) we do not expect to recover the entire amortized cost basis of the security.

***Other Real Estate Owned***

Real estate acquired through foreclosure is initially recorded at the lower of cost or estimated fair value less selling costs. Subsequent to the date of acquisition, it is carried at the lower of cost or fair value, adjusted for net selling costs. Fair values of real estate owned are reviewed regularly and write-downs are recorded when it is determined that the carrying value of real estate exceeds the fair value less estimated costs to sell. Costs relating to the develop