

# GUARDIAN MANAGED GROWTH PORTFOLIO

## Q4 2025

### COMMENTARY

#### Market Overview

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Global financial markets capped a strong year with further gains in Q4 as focus shifted away from the persistent political uncertainty and toward the signs of positive and broadening economic momentum — supported by monetary and fiscal easing — and the implications for corporate earnings. The resulting improvement in investor sentiment saw major equity benchmarks close the year at or near record highs.

In equities, the MSCI World Index rose 1.6% in Canadian dollar terms for the three months ended December to close out its third consecutive year of gains in excess of 15% (+15.4% in Canadian dollars for 2025). In contrast to the previous two years, 2025 saw gains extend beyond the artificial intelligence-related company stock gains in the U.S. — the American benchmark S&P 500 Index recorded a further 1.1% (in CAD terms) increase in the final three months of the year to bring its total return for the year to 12.4%, however, that lagged the gains in Canada (S&P/TSX Composite Index +6.3% in Q4, +31.7% for the year) and Europe, Australasia & the Far East (MSCI EAFE Index +3.3% in Q4, +25.1% in 2025 in CAD terms) for both the quarter and the year as a whole.

The run of positive data surprises to end the year, however, saw markets pare back their expectations for further central bank policy easing — in Canada, markets actually began to price in the prospect of hikes by the end of 2026 which put upward pressure on market yields and weighed on fixed income performance. The FTSE Canada Universe Bond Index ended Q4 down 0.3% to pare the annual total return to +2.6%, with the more interest rate sensitive longer-term and government bonds underperforming corporate credit and securities with shorter duration in the quarter.

#### Performance Attribution

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The Guardian Managed Growth Fund's (the "Fund") tilt in favour of Equities and underweight to Fixed Income versus its Strategic Asset Allocation again made a positive contribution to relative performance in the quarter, as did the exposures to credit strategies in Fixed Income allocations. These effects, however, were more than offset by the negative impact of the underperformance in the quarter of the Canadian and Global Equity mutual fund's held in the Fund's portfolio. The net result was that the Fund's tactical multi-asset portfolio trailed its blended benchmark in Q4.

#### Portfolio Transactions

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Given the assessment of current macroeconomic and market conditions and expectations, the Manager decided it remained comfortable with the overall risk exposures in the Fund's portfolio. No material changes were made to Equity and Fixed Income allocations in Q4. With the merger of the Guardian Canadian Growth Equity Fund with the Guardian Canadian Equity Fund in the quarter, however, the decision was made to move some of the weight from the consolidated mandate, which holds below benchmark exposure in the increasingly prominent domestic Information Technology sector to the Guardian Canadian Equity Select Fund that has greater exposure to this sector.

#### Portfolio Outlook & Positioning

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The story of 2025 was that underlying global economic momentum — underpinned by consumers and AI-driven investments with an assist from monetary easing and growing fiscal supports — was sustained and broadened out in spite of some gale force headwinds. This was reflected in the strengthening earnings, which in turn provided a broad boost to financial markets.

Looking ahead at the year to come, there is little reason to anticipate that this object in motion will not stay in motion, barring any sort of unforeseen shock (for which the risks are arguably elevated).

The worst of the U.S. government economic policy-related shocks to the system could be in the past, as there may be a diminished appetite to disrupt activity and stoke market volatility ahead of the U.S. midterms slated for November. With respect to monetary policy, while the coming year is unlikely to see the same magnitude of easing as occurred over the last two years as central banks approach their “neutral” policy settings — and there is the potential that further upside surprises to growth and corresponding firm inflation could result in less easing than is currently anticipated — the bar appears to be elevated for any course correction, which could keep short-term rates anchored and market yields within recent ranges.

The Manager acknowledges that there are risks around AI should the benefits from investments prove more limited than assumed, but this will be likely be a story that plays out further out the forecast horizon. Near-term, the prospect of increased clarity for the outlook and fairly benign interest rates would appear to be supportive of continued business capital investment. Add in ongoing, if somewhat more moderate, consumer spending growth supported by strong household balance sheets, and the renewed global focus on government investment, and that sets the stage for sustained economic momentum in the months ahead.

This represents a constructive fundamental backdrop for financial markets in the year to come that can support further, if likely more modest, positive performance across asset classes, even with generally elevated valuations. In the near term, Newton’s first law of motion looks to apply to markets.

Further, the broadening out of economic and earnings growth, and healthy concerns about valuations in the areas of the market that have massively outperformed in recent years, suggest that there is scope for the broadening out of market performance seen in 2025 to continue — which could prove supportive of more actively managed investment strategies whose performance has been challenged by narrow leadership.

Taking it all together, the Manager remains comfortable with the overall risk exposures of the Fund’s portfolio. Accordingly, the Fund’s portfolio remains overweight Equity with a continued bias toward Global quality-focused strategies. Fixed Income allocations maintain a tilt to high quality credits and a modestly below benchmark duration.

The Manager will continue to monitor economic and market developments closely and stands ready to tactically exploit opportunities that may present themselves.

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