

Ares Commercial Real Estate Corp  
Form DEF 14A  
April 27, 2016

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UNITED STATES  
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION  
Washington, D.C. 20549

**SCHEDULE 14A**

Proxy Statement Pursuant to Section 14(a) of  
the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (Amendment No.        )

Filed by the Registrant

Filed by a Party other than the Registrant

Check the appropriate box:

- Preliminary Proxy Statement
- Confidential, for Use of the Commission Only (as permitted by Rule 14a-6(e)(2))**
- Definitive Proxy Statement
- Definitive Additional Materials
- Soliciting Material under §240.14a-12

**ARES COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE CORPORATION**

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(Name of Registrant as Specified In Its Charter)

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(Name of Person(s) Filing Proxy Statement, if other than the Registrant)

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-

## Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation

245 Park Avenue, 42nd Floor  
New York, NY 10167

April 27, 2016

Dear Stockholder:

You are cordially invited to attend the 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders (the "Annual Meeting") of Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation (the "Company") to be held on June 27, 2016 at 11:00 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, at the offices of Proskauer Rose LLP, Eleven Times Square, New York, New York 10036.

At the Annual Meeting, you will be asked to (i) elect two directors of the Company (ii) ratify the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as the Company's independent registered public accounting firm and (iii) approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the compensation of the Company's named executive officers, each as more fully described in the accompanying proxy statement.

Your vote is important regardless of the number of shares you own.

We will be using the "Notice and Access" method of providing proxy materials to stockholders. We believe that this process will provide a convenient and quick way to access the proxy materials, including the Company's proxy statement and 2015 annual report to stockholders, and authorize a proxy to vote your shares, while allowing us to conserve natural resources and reduce the costs of printing and distributing the proxy materials.

On or about May 4, 2016, the Company will mail to stockholders a Notice of Internet Availability of Proxy Materials, which we refer to as the Notice and Access card, containing instructions on how to access the proxy statement and 2015 annual report to stockholders and authorize a proxy to vote electronically via the Internet or by telephone. The Notice and Access card also contains instructions as to how stockholders can receive a paper copy of the proxy materials and authorize a proxy to vote by mail.

**If you hold shares of the Company's common stock in "street name" through a broker, bank or other institution or nominee, you must follow the instructions provided by your broker or other financial institution regarding how to instruct your broker or financial institution to vote your shares.**

We urge you to submit your proxy voting instructions to the Company as soon as possible even if you currently plan to attend the Annual Meeting. This will not prevent you from voting in person but will assure that your vote is counted if you are unable to attend the Annual Meeting.

On behalf of your board of directors, thank you for your continued interest and support.

Sincerely,

/s/ ROBERT L. ROSEN

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Robert L. Rosen  
*Chairman of the Board of Directors*

## **Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation**

**245 Park Avenue, 42nd Floor  
New York, NY 10167**

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### **NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF STOCKHOLDERS TO BE HELD ON JUNE 27, 2016**

To the Stockholders of Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation:

Notice is hereby given that the 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders (the "Annual Meeting") of Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation, a Maryland corporation (the "Company"), will be held on June 27, 2016 at 11:00 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, at the offices of Proskauer Rose LLP, Eleven Times Square, New York, New York 10036 for the following purposes:

1. To elect two directors to serve until the Company's 2019 annual meeting of stockholders, and until their successors are duly elected and qualify;
2. To consider and vote upon the ratification of the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as the Company's independent registered public accounting firm for the year ending December 31, 2016;
3. To consider and vote upon the approval, on a non-binding, advisory basis, of the compensation of the Company's named executive officers, as more fully described in the accompanying proxy statement; and
4. To consider and take action upon such other matters as may properly come before the Annual Meeting or any adjournment or postponement thereof.

Only the holders of record of shares of common stock of the Company at the close of business on the record date, April 15, 2016, will be entitled to receive notice of and vote at the Annual Meeting or any adjournment or postponement thereof.

Your vote is important regardless of the number of shares you own. Accordingly, we urge you to promptly submit your proxy voting instructions even if you currently plan to attend the Annual Meeting. This will not prevent you from voting in person but will assure that your vote is counted if you are unable to attend the Annual Meeting.

You have the option to revoke your proxy at any time prior to the Annual Meeting, or to vote your shares personally on request if you attend the Annual Meeting. If there are not sufficient votes for a quorum or to approve or ratify any of the foregoing proposals at the time of the Annual Meeting, the meeting may be adjourned in order to permit further solicitation of proxies by the Company.

**If you hold shares of the Company's common stock in "street name" through a broker, bank or other institution or nominee, you must follow the instructions provided by your broker or other financial institution regarding how to instruct your broker or financial institution to vote your shares.**

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Your proxy is being solicited by the Company's board of directors. The board of directors recommends that you vote FOR the election of the two directors listed in the accompanying proxy statement to serve until the Company's 2019 annual meeting of stockholders, and until their successors are duly elected and qualify, FOR the ratification of the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as the Company's independent registered public accounting firm for the year ending December 31, 2016 and FOR the resolution to approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the compensation of the Company's named executive officers.

By Order of the Board of Directors,

/s/ ANTON FEINGOLD

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Anton Feingold  
*Secretary*

New York, New York  
April 27, 2016

**Important Notice Regarding the Availability of Proxy Materials for the Annual Meeting of Stockholders to be held on June 27, 2016:** The Proxy Statement and the Company's 2015 Annual Report are available at: <http://materials.proxyvote.com/04013V>.

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## Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation

245 Park Avenue, 42nd Floor  
New York, NY 10167

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### PROXY STATEMENT FOR 2016 ANNUAL MEETING OF STOCKHOLDERS

This proxy statement is being furnished to stockholders in connection with the solicitation of proxies by the board of directors (the "Board") of Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation, a Maryland corporation (the "Company," "we," "us" or "our"), for use at the Annual Meeting of Stockholders (the "Annual Meeting") to be held on June 27, 2016 at 11:00 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, at the offices of Proskauer Rose LLP, Eleven Times Square, New York, New York 10036 or at any adjournment or postponement thereof. This proxy statement, the notice of annual meeting of stockholders and the related proxy card are first being made available to our stockholders on or about April 27, 2016.

This proxy statement is accompanied by our 2015 Annual Report which includes audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2015 audited by Ernst & Young LLP, our independent registered public accounting firm, and their report thereon, dated March 1, 2016.

We encourage you to vote your shares, either by voting in person at the Annual Meeting or by granting a proxy (i.e., authorizing someone to vote your shares). If you properly authorize your proxy and we receive it in time for the Annual Meeting, the persons named as proxies will vote the shares registered directly in your name in the manner that you specify. **If you return an executed proxy, but no specification is made, the votes entitled to be cast by you will be cast FOR the election of the two directors listed in the accompanying proxy statement to serve until our 2019 annual meeting of stockholders, and until their successors are duly elected and qualify, FOR the ratification of the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm for the year ending December 31, 2016 and FOR the resolution to approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the compensation of our named executive officers. As to any other business which may properly come before the Annual Meeting or any postponements or adjournments thereof, the persons named as proxy holders on your proxy card will vote the shares of common stock represented by properly submitted proxies in their discretion.**

Any stockholder "of record" (i.e., stockholders holding shares directly in their name) giving a valid proxy for the Annual Meeting may revoke it before it is exercised by giving a later-dated properly executed proxy, by giving notice of revocation to us in writing before or at the Annual Meeting or by attending the Annual Meeting and voting in person. However, the mere presence of the stockholder at the Annual Meeting does not revoke the proxy. If you hold shares of our common stock in "street name" through a broker, bank or other institution or nominee, you may vote such shares at the Annual Meeting only if you obtain proper written authority from your broker, bank or other institution or nominee and present it at the Annual Meeting. If your shares are held for your account by a broker, bank or other institution or nominee, to revoke any voting instructions prior to the time the vote is taken at the Annual Meeting, you must contact such broker, bank or other institution or nominee to determine how to revoke your vote in accordance with their policies a sufficient time in advance of the Annual Meeting.

Unless revoked as stated above, the shares of common stock represented by valid proxies will be voted on all matters to be acted upon at the Annual Meeting. With respect to the election of

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directors, proxies cannot be voted for a greater number of persons than the number of nominees named.

The Board is not aware of any matter to be presented for action at the Annual Meeting other than the matters set forth herein. Should any other matter requiring a vote of stockholders arise, it is the intention of the persons named in the proxy to vote in accordance with their discretion on such matters. Stockholders have no dissenters' or appraisal rights in connection with any of the proposals described herein.

The record date for determination of stockholders entitled to vote at the Annual Meeting is the close of business on April 15, 2016. As of the close of business on April 15, 2016, there were 28,503,778 shares of our common stock outstanding. Each share of common stock has one vote. The presence, in person or by proxy, of the holders of shares of common stock entitled to cast a majority of the votes entitled to be cast shall constitute a quorum for the purposes of the Annual Meeting. If there are not sufficient votes for a quorum or to approve or ratify any of the foregoing proposals at the time of the Annual Meeting, the chairman of the meeting may adjourn the Annual Meeting in order to permit further solicitation of proxies. Abstentions and broker non-votes will be deemed to be present for the purpose of determining a quorum for the Annual Meeting. A broker non-vote occurs when a nominee holding shares for a beneficial owner (i.e., a broker) does not vote on a particular proposal because such nominee does not have discretionary voting power for that particular matter and has not received instructions from the beneficial owner. Under the rules of the New York Stock Exchange ("NYSE"), the only item to be acted upon at the Annual Meeting with respect to which a broker or nominee will be permitted to exercise voting discretion is the ratification of the appointment of Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm for the year ending December 31, 2016. Therefore, if you hold your shares in "street name" and do not give the broker or nominee specific voting instructions on the election of the two directors or on the resolution to approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the compensation of our named executive officers, your shares will not be voted on those items, and a broker non-vote will occur. Broker non-votes will have no effect on the voting results for such items.

The affirmative vote of a plurality of the votes cast at a meeting at which a quorum is present is required under our Amended and Restated Bylaws (the "Bylaws") to approve Proposal 1 (the election of two directors to serve until our 2019 annual meeting of stockholders and until their successors are duly elected and qualify). This means that the nominees with the most votes are elected. For purposes of the vote on Proposal 1, you may vote "For" or withhold authority to vote for each of the nominees to the Board. "Withheld" votes and broker non-votes will not be counted as votes cast and will have no effect on the result of the vote. However, each director has agreed that if he or she receives more "Withheld" votes than "For" votes, the director will tender his or her resignation for consideration by the nominating and governance committee. For additional details, including a description of our director resignation policy, see the section of this proxy statement entitled "Proposal 1: Election of Directors."

You may vote "For" or "Against," or abstain from voting on Proposal 2 (to ratify the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm). The affirmative vote of at least a majority of all of the votes cast at a meeting at which a quorum is present is required for approval of Proposal 2 (meaning the number of shares voted "For" Proposal 2 must exceed the number of shares voted "Against" Proposal 2). For purposes of the vote on Proposal 2, abstentions will not be counted as votes cast and will have no effect on the result of the vote.

You may vote "For" or "Against," or abstain from voting on Proposal 3 (to approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the compensation of our named executive officers). The affirmative vote of at least a majority of all of the votes cast at a meeting at which a quorum is present is required for approval of Proposal 3 (meaning the number of shares voted "For" Proposal 3 must exceed the number

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of shares voted "Against" Proposal 3). For purposes of the vote on Proposal 3, abstentions and broker non-votes will not be counted as votes cast and will have no effect on the result of the vote.

We will bear the cost of solicitation of proxies in relation to this proxy statement. Proxies will be solicited by mail, by telephone, by electronic mail or by facsimile, telegram or other electronic means or by requesting brokers and other custodians, nominees and fiduciaries to forward proxy soliciting material to the beneficial owners of shares of common stock held of record by such brokers, custodians, nominees and fiduciaries, each of whom we will reimburse for its expenses in so doing. In addition to the use of mail, directors, officers and regular employees of Ares Commercial Real Estate Management LLC, our external manager (our "Manager"), without special compensation therefor, may solicit proxies personally, by telephone, by electronic mail or by facsimile, telegram or other electronic means from stockholders.

**The Board recommends that you vote FOR the election of the two directors listed in this proxy statement to serve until our 2019 annual meeting of stockholders, and until their successors are duly elected and qualify, FOR the ratification of the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm for the year ending December 31, 2016 and FOR the resolution to approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the compensation of our named executive officers.**

**PROPOSAL 1: ELECTION OF DIRECTORS**

**In Memoriam: Michael H. Diamond**

It is with great sadness that we mourn the passing of our colleague and friend, Michael Diamond. Mr. Diamond had served with great distinction as one of our independent directors since our initial public offering. We are grateful for his service and will greatly miss his energy, integrity, wisdom, dedication and commitment to excellence.

**Election of Directors**

Under our charter (as amended, the "Charter") and the Bylaws (together with the Charter, the "Charter Documents"), our directors are divided into three classes. Directors are elected for a staggered term of three years each, with a term of office of only one of these three classes of directors expiring each year. Each director will hold office for the term to which he or she is elected and until his or her successor is duly elected and qualifies, or until the director's earlier resignation, death or removal.

The terms of William L. Browning and John Jardine, the Class I directors, will expire at the Annual Meeting, and the nominating and governance committee has recommended, and the Board has nominated, Messrs. Browning and Jardine to stand for re-election at the Annual Meeting and to hold office until the annual meeting to be held in 2019 and until their successors are duly elected and qualify. Messrs. Browning and Jardine have agreed to continue to serve as directors if elected and have consented to be named as nominees. The Charter Documents provide that directors shall be elected by the affirmative vote of a plurality of the votes cast at the Annual Meeting. This means that Messrs. Browning and Jardine must receive the most votes to be elected as our directors for the term for which they have been nominated.

A stockholder can vote for or withhold his or her vote from such director nominee. Nominees are elected by a plurality vote, which means that the nominees with the most votes are elected. However, pursuant to our Corporate Governance Guidelines, any nominee in an uncontested election who receives a greater number of votes withheld from his or her election than votes for his or her election will, within five days following the certification of the stockholder vote, tender his or her written resignation to the Chairman of the Board for consideration by the nominating and governance committee. The Nominating and Governance Committee will then review the director's continuation on the Board and recommend to the Board whether the Board should accept such tendered resignation. The Board will promptly and publicly disclose its decision and, if applicable, the reasons for rejecting the tendered resignation.

In the absence of instructions to the contrary, it is the intention of the persons named as proxies to vote such proxy **FOR** the election of the two directors named herein. If any nominee should decline or be unable to serve as a director, it is intended that the proxy will be voted for the election of such person as is nominated as a replacement by the nominating and governance committee and by the Board. The Board has no reason to believe that any nominee will be unable or unwilling to serve.

**Information about the Directors**

The information set forth below was furnished to us by each director, and sets forth as of April 27, 2016, the name, age, principal occupation or employment of each such person, all positions and offices such person has held with us, and the period during which he or she has served as our director or executive officer. Messrs. Browning and Jardine have not been proposed for election nor has any director been selected as a director pursuant to any agreement or understanding with us or any other person.

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Currently, the Board is comprised of eight members, which are divided into three classes serving staggered terms. Each director generally serves until the annual meeting of stockholders held in the third year following the year of his or her election and until a successor is duly elected and qualifies. The Bylaws provide that a majority of the entire Board may at any time increase or decrease the number of directors. However, unless the Bylaws are amended, the number of directors may never be less than the minimum required by the Maryland General Corporation Law, or more than 15.

We divide our directors into two groups interested directors and independent directors. Independent directors are directors that the Board has affirmatively determined satisfy the requirements of Rule 303A.02 of the NYSE Listed Company Manual. Directors for which no such determination has been made are considered interested directors.

Name	Age	Position(s) Held with Company and Length of Time Served
Rand S. April	65	Director (Class III Director) since April 2016*
Michael J. Arougheti	43	Director (Class III Director) since September 2011(Chairman of the Board from September 2011 through March 2014)
Caroline E. Blakely	61	Director (Class II Director) since February 2014*
William L. Browning	62	Director (Class I Director) since February 2014*
John Hope Bryant	50	Director (Class II Director) since April 2012*
John B. Jardine	63	Director (Class I Director), Co-Chief Executive Officer and President since August 2015)
Robert L. Rosen	69	Chairman of the Board since October 2014 and Director (Class II Director) since April 2012; Interim Co-Chief Executive Officer since August 2015
James E. Skinner	62	Director (Class III Director) since April 2016*

\*

Our Board has determined that this director is independent for purposes of the NYSE corporate governance listing requirements.

Based on the recommendations of the nominating and governance committee, the Board has identified certain desired attributes for directors. Each of the directors has demonstrated high character and integrity, superior credentials and recognition in his or her respective field and the relevant expertise and experience upon which to be able to offer advice and guidance to our management. Each of the directors also has sufficient time available to devote to our affairs, is able to work with the other members of the Board and contribute to our success and can represent the long-term interests of our stockholders as a whole. The directors have been selected such that the Board represents a range of backgrounds and experience. There is no familial relationship among any of the members of the Board or executive officers.

Set forth below is biographical information for the directors as of April 27, 2016. The biographical information of each director includes a discussion of such director's particular experience, qualifications, attributes or skills, as of the date of this proxy statement, that lead us to conclude that such individual should serve as a director, in light of our business and structure.

### *Nominees for Class I Directors (Current term expires at the 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders)*

**William L. Browning** is one of our Class I directors and currently serves as the Chairperson of the audit committee and as a member of the compensation committee. Mr. Browning has dedicated his time to serving on boards of directors since January 2012. From 1999 to January 2012, Mr. Browning was a senior client service partner at Ernst & Young LLP, a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. From 2008 to 2012, Mr. Browning served as the managing partner for Ernst & Young LLP's Los Angeles office, which at the time of his departure was Ernst & Young LLP's second largest practice in the Americas and the largest public accounting firm in Los Angeles with over 1,200

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professionals and over \$400 million in annual revenues. Mr. Browning's extensive industry sector experience includes: real estate and REITs, financial services (commercial banks, asset management, consumer finance, credit card and mortgage companies), private equity, energy (upstream/downstream, refining and natural gas), engineering and construction, and technology. Before joining Ernst & Young LLP, Mr. Browning began his professional career with Arthur Andersen & Co. in 1976, where he was admitted to partnership in 1987 and named office managing partner of its Oklahoma office in 1994. At Arthur Andersen & Co. in Oklahoma and in Los Angeles, California, Mr. Browning served clients in a wide variety of industries and led the firm's domestic banking practice and regulatory compliance practice. Mr. Browning also serves on the board of directors of (i) McCarthy Holdings, the holding company for McCarthy Building Companies, Inc., one of the top 10 U.S. commercial builders and the oldest American construction company, (ii) Parsley Energy, Inc., an independent oil and natural gas company, (iii) Community Bank, a Regional Business Bank based in Pasadena, California and (iv) Blackbrush Oil and Gas LP, an independent oil and gas exploration and development company that is also a portfolio company of a fund managed by an affiliate of our Manager. Mr. Browning is also an adjunct professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Mr. Browning volunteers on the board of CARE, a non-profit organization focused on assisting young adults with chemical abuse issues, as well as on the Dallas Summer Musicals board. Mr. Browning holds a B.B.A. from the University of Oklahoma and is a certified public accountant in Oklahoma, California and Texas. Mr. Browning's experience in accounting and auditing, including in the real estate and REIT industries, provides the Board and, specifically, the audit committee, with valuable knowledge, insight and experience in such matters.

**John B. Jardine** is our President and Co-Chief Executive Officer and is one of our Class I directors. Mr. Jardine is a member of our Manager's Investment Committee and is also a member of Ares Management's Management Committee. Mr. Jardine is a Partner in the Ares Real Estate Group and since joining Ares Management in December of 2013, Mr. Jardine has been responsible for debt originations at the Ares Real Estate Group, including originations by the Company and its mortgage banking subsidiary, ACRE Capital LLC. He is a seasoned real estate investor, having spent more than 20 years at TIAA-CREF, where he negotiated and closed large transactions and oversaw the performance of several multi-billion dollar commercial real estate portfolios. Mr. Jardine also led the formation of TIAA Realty, Inc., a private real estate investment trust. Prior to joining Ares Management, Mr. Jardine was a Managing Director with C-III Asset Management, a primary and special loan servicer, from 2011 to 2013. Additionally, Mr. Jardine worked as a Managing Director focusing on commercial mortgage-related credit strategies for ZAIS Group, an investment management company focused on specialized credit strategies, from 2008 to 2011. Mr. Jardine graduated from Dartmouth College with a B.A., with honors, in English. His credentials provide the Board with extensive relationships and deep practical experience in the commercial real estate finance industry.

**The Board recommends that you vote FOR the election of William L. Browning and John B. Jardine as directors of our Company for the term for which they have been nominated.**

### *Directors Continuing in Office*

### *Class II Directors (Current term expires at the 2017 Annual Meeting of Stockholders)*

**Caroline E. Blakely** is one of our Class II directors and currently serves as the Chairperson of the nominating and governance committee and as a member of the audit committee. Ms. Blakely is currently the Chief Executive Officer and President of Rebuilding Together, Inc., a leading national nonprofit in safe and healthy housing. Ms. Blakely was a partner in the Real Estate Group at Cassin & Cassin LLP, a law firm providing legal services that focus on real estate finance, real estate transactions and private client services from October 2013 to December 2015. Prior to joining Cassin & Cassin LLP, Ms. Blakely served as a Vice President of the multifamily business of the Federal National Mortgage Association ("Fannie Mae") from April 1999 to October 2013. In this capacity, Ms. Blakely defined the

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strategic direction for Fannie Mae's growing asset management and counterparty responsibilities. In addition, Ms. Blakely was responsible for mitigating the financial and operational risk of 24 Delegated Underwriting Servicing Lenders, including assessing the counterparty's capital adequacy to share risk with Fannie Mae. She initiated performing note sales and negotiated the first sale of multifamily mortgage servicing rights. Ms. Blakely also served as Chief Marketing Officer of National Cooperative Bank ("NCB") and as Senior Managing Director of NCB's Corporate Banking and Commercial Real Estate Divisions from 1992 to 1999, during which time she served as a member of NCB's Executive Committee and as President of NCB Capital Corporation. In 1980, Ms. Blakely founded a law firm specializing in structured finance and real estate lending for acquisition, development and construction loans, where she practiced until 1992. Ms. Blakely currently serves on the executive committee of the Urban Land Institute's Women's Leadership Initiative and volunteers on the Board of Trustees for Global Communities, a non-profit organization specializing in international development and microfinance. Ms. Blakely holds a B.A. in English from the University of Virginia and a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center, where she graduated cum laude. Ms. Blakely's significant experience as a lawyer and adviser to real estate investors and real estate transaction experience provides valuable knowledge to the Board.

**John Hope Bryant** is one of our Class II directors and currently serves as the Chairperson of the compensation committee and as a member of the nominating and governance committee. Mr. Bryant is the founder, chairman, and chief executive officer of Operation HOPE (HOPE), the nation's first nonprofit financial services network for the underserved, which began in May 1992 and operates as a global provider of financial dignity and economic empowerment tools and services to low wealth individuals. HOPE has served over two million clients, representing an investment of \$2.5 billion into underserved communities. Mr. Bryant is also the founder and chief executive officer of Bryant Group Ventures, a private holding company, which began in 1991 and invests principally in its own operations, partnerships, companies and opportunities, including Bryant Group Real Estate, LLC. On February 26, 2014, Mr. Bryant was appointed by U.S. President Barack Obama to serve on his new U.S. President's Advisory Council on Financial Capability for Young Americans, focused on the next generation of young leaders. Prior to President Obama's administration, Mr. Bryant served as a senior advisor to both President Bush and President Clinton. Mr. Bryant is also the author of *HOW THE POOR CAN SAVE CAPITALISM* and *LOVE LEADERSHIP: The New Way to Lead in a Fear Based World*. Mr. Bryant's vast experience as an entrepreneur over the last twenty years provides the Board with a valuable combination of leadership and practical knowledge.

**Robert L. Rosen** is one of our Class II directors and the Chairman of the Board. Mr. Rosen is currently serving as our Interim Co-Chief Executive Officer since August 2015 and is a member of our Manager's Investment Committee. Mr. Rosen has been a Partner of Ares Management since February 2016 and was previously an Operating Advisor to the Ares Management Private Equity Group. Mr. Rosen is the managing partner of RLR Capital Partners, which invests principally in the securities of publicly traded North American companies. From 2005 to 2008, Mr. Rosen was a Managing Partner of RLR Focus Fund LP, an "active value" hedge fund. From 1995 to 2001, Mr. Rosen served as an exclusive consultant to Apollo Management, L.P. Mr. Rosen has served as a director of Ares Capital Corporation (NASDAQ: ARCC) since 2004. Mr. Rosen previously served as a director of Sapien Corporation. In 1998, Mr. Rosen founded National Financial Partners (NYSE: NFP) ("NFP"), an independent distributor of financial services to high net worth individuals and small to medium sized corporations. He served as NFP's CEO from 1998 to 2000 and as its Chairman until January 2002. From 1987 to 1993, Mr. Rosen was a Managing Partner of Ballantrae Partners, L.P., an investment partnership. From 1989 to 1993, Mr. Rosen was Chairman and CEO of Damon Corporation, a leading healthcare and laboratory testing company that was ultimately sold to Quest Diagnostics. From 1983 to 1987, Mr. Rosen was Vice Chairman of Maxxam Group. Prior to that, Mr. Rosen spent twelve years at Shearson American Express in positions in research, investment banking and senior management, and for two years was Assistant to Sanford Weill, the then Chairman and CEO of Shearson. Mr. Rosen is a

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member of the NYU Stern School of Business Board of Overseers. Mr. Rosen holds an M.B.A. in finance from NYU's Stern School of Business. Mr. Rosen's 35 years of experience as a senior executive of financial services, healthcare services and private equity funds provides broad financial industry and specific investment management insight and experience to the Board. In addition, Mr. Rosen's expertise in finance, which served as the basis for his appointment as an Adjunct Professor of Finance at Fordham University Graduate School of Business, provides valuable knowledge to the Board.

### *Class III Directors (Current term expires at the 2018 Annual Meeting of Stockholders)*

**Rand S. April** is one of our Class III directors and currently serves as a member of the nominating and governance committee.

Mr. April was a Partner of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, an international law firm, from 1981 until 2013 and Mr. April served as the Managing Partner of Skadden's Los Angeles office from 1994 until 2012. Subsequent to Mr. April's retirement as a Partner in 2013, he was Of Counsel of Skadden until April 2016. During his time at Skadden, Mr. April had an extensive real estate and finance practice, regularly advising both U.S. and international clients in transactions involving a wide variety of real estate asset classes. He has considerable experience with the public and private offering of various types of real estate securities, including REIT and securitized debt offerings. Mr. April is also a longtime board member and former Chairman of Public Counsel Law Center, the nation's largest pro bono law firm serving the indigent, where he was interim President and Chief Executive Officer in 2015, and is a board member of Town Hall Los Angeles, where he served as Chairman from 2010 to 2011. He currently serves as a member of the Advisory Board of the Los Angeles Sports and Entertainment Commission. Mr. April holds a B.A., *phi beta kappa*, from Northwestern University and a J.D. from Columbia University School of Law, where he was a Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar. Mr. April's extensive experience as a partner of a major international law firm and as a real estate and finance lawyer advising companies, including REITs in transactions involving a wide variety of real estate asset classes, provides the Board with valuable knowledge and insight into the real estate industry.

**Michael J Arougheti** is one of our Class III directors. He served as the Chairman of the Board from September 2011 through March 2014. Mr. Arougheti is a Co-Founder and President of Ares Management, Partner of the Ares Credit Group and a member of Ares Management's board of directors and its Management Committee. He serves as a director and President of Ares Management GP LLC and also serves as Co-Chairman of the board of directors and Executive Vice President of Ares Capital Corporation. Mr. Arougheti is also a member of the Ares Credit Group's Direct Lending Investment Committees. Mr. Arougheti may from time to time serve as an officer, director or principal of entities affiliated with Ares Management or of investment funds managed by Ares Management and its affiliates. Prior to joining Ares Management in 2004, Mr. Arougheti was employed by Royal Bank of Canada from 2001 to 2004, where he was a Managing Partner of the Principal Finance Group of RBC Capital Partners and a member of the firm's Mezzanine Investment Committee. Mr. Arougheti oversaw an investment team that originated, managed and monitored a diverse portfolio of middle-market leveraged loans, senior and junior subordinated debt, preferred equity and common stock and warrants on behalf of RBC and other third-party institutional investors. Mr. Arougheti joined Royal Bank of Canada in October 2001 from Indosuez Capital, where he was a Principal and an Investment Committee member, responsible for originating, structuring and executing leveraged transactions across a broad range of products and asset classes. Prior to joining Indosuez in 1994, Mr. Arougheti worked at Kidder, Peabody & Co., where he was a member of the firm's Mergers and Acquisitions Group. Mr. Arougheti also serves on the boards of directors of Investor Group Services, Riverspace Arts, a not-for-profit arts organization and Operation HOPE, a not-for-profit organization focused on expanding economic opportunity in underserved communities through economic education and empowerment. Mr. Arougheti received a B.A. in Ethics, Politics and Economics, cum laude, from Yale University. Mr. Arougheti's knowledge of, and extensive experience

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in, investment management, leveraged finance and financial services gives the Board valuable industry-specific knowledge and expertise on these and other matters.

**James E. Skinner** is one of our Class III directors and currently serves as a member of the audit committee and the compensation committee. Mr. Skinner held various senior management positions with The Neiman Marcus Group LLC from June 2005 until his retirement in March 2016, including serving as Vice Chairman between May 2015 and March 2016, Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer between October 2010 and May 2015, and prior to that date, served as Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of The Neiman Marcus Group, Inc. from October 2001 to October 2005. Mr. Skinner served as Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of CapRock Communications Corp. in 2000, and served as Executive Vice President, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer of CompUSA Inc. from 1994 until 2000. Mr. Skinner also served as a partner with Ernst & Young from 1987 until 1991. Mr. Skinner serves on the board of directors of Fossil Group, Inc. (NASDAQ:FOSL), a global design, marketing and distribution company of consumer fashion accessories. Mr. Skinner holds a B.B.A. from Texas Tech University and is a certified public accountant in Texas. Mr. Skinner provides the Board with extensive leadership experience obtained from his service as a chief financial officer of large organizations and his extensive knowledge in accounting, finance, capital markets, strategic planning and risk management.

**The Board recommends that you vote FOR the election of William L. Browning and John B. Jardine as directors of our Company for the term for which they have been nominated.**

**PROPOSAL 2: RATIFICATION OF SELECTION OF INDEPENDENT REGISTERED PUBLIC ACCOUNTING FIRM**

The audit committee and the Board have selected Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm for the year ending December 31, 2016 and are submitting the selection of Ernst & Young LLP to our stockholders for ratification. Ernst & Young LLP has audited our financial statements since our inception in September 2011 through the year ending December 31, 2015, and has also provided us certain tax services. Neither our Charter Documents nor applicable law requires stockholder ratification of the appointment of Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm. However, the Board is submitting the appointment of Ernst & Young LLP to our stockholders for ratification as a matter of good corporate practice.

If our stockholders fail to ratify the selection of Ernst & Young LLP, the audit committee and the Board will consider whether or not to direct the appointment of a different independent registered public accounting firm. Even if the selection is ratified, the audit committee and the Board may direct the appointment of a different independent registered public accounting firm at any time during the year if they determine that such a change would be in our best interests.

We expect that a representative of Ernst & Young LLP will be present at the Annual Meeting, will have an opportunity to make a statement if he or she so chooses and will be available to answer questions.

**Principal Accountant Fees and Services**

The following are aggregate fees billed to us by Ernst & Young LLP during the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015 and December 31, 2014:

	<b>Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2015</b>	<b>Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2014</b>
Audit Fees	\$ 767,000	\$ 773,000
Audit-Related Fees	196,000	300,000
Tax Fees		294,000
All Other Fees		
<b>Total Fees</b>	<b>\$ 963,000</b>	<b>\$ 1,367,000</b>

***Audit Fees***

Audit fees consist of fees billed for professional services rendered for the audit of our consolidated financial statements and review of the interim consolidated financial statements included in quarterly reports and services that are normally provided by Ernst & Young LLP in connection with statutory and regulatory filings, our registration statements and securities offerings.

***Audit Related Fees***

Audit-related fees are fees billed for assurance and related services that are reasonably related to the performance of the audit or review of our consolidated financial statements and are not reported under "Audit Fees." For the years ended December 31, 2015 and December 31, 2014, audit-related fees are primarily related to audit related consultations, compliance audits and agreed-upon procedures audits.

*Tax Fees*

Tax fees consist of fees billed for professional services for tax compliance, tax advice and tax planning. These services include assistance regarding federal, state and tax compliance, customs and duties, mergers and acquisitions and tax planning.

*All Other Fees*

All other fees consist of fees for products and services other than the services reported above.

The audit committee, or the chairperson of the audit committee to whom such authority was delegated by the audit committee, must pre-approve all services provided by the independent registered public accounting firm. Any such pre-approval by the chairperson must be presented to the audit committee at its next regular quarterly meeting. The audit committee has also adopted policies and procedures for pre-approving certain non-prohibited work performed by our independent registered public accounting firm. Specifically, the committee has pre-approved the use of Ernst & Young LLP for specific types of services within the following categories: audit, audit-related, tax and other. In each case, the committee has also set a specific annual limit, which can be updated, on the amount of such services which we may obtain from our independent registered public accounting firm. The audit committee does not delegate its responsibilities to pre-approve services performed by the independent registered public accounting firm to management.

The affirmative vote of at least a majority of the votes cast at the Annual Meeting is required for the approval of this proposal to ratify the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2016. In the absence of instructions to the contrary, it is the intention of the persons named as proxies to vote such proxy **FOR** this proposal.

**The Board, based on the approval and recommendation of the audit committee, recommends a vote FOR this proposal to ratify the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as our independent registered public accounting firm for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2016.**

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*Notwithstanding anything to the contrary set forth in any of the Company's previous filings under the Securities Act of 1933, as amended (the "Securities Act"), or the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended (the "Exchange Act"), that might incorporate future filings, including this proxy statement, in whole or in part, the following Report of the Audit Committee shall not be deemed to be "soliciting material" or to be "filed" with the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC"), nor shall such information be incorporated by reference into any such filings under the Securities Act or the Exchange Act.*

### REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

The role of the audit committee (the "Audit Committee") of the board of directors (the "Board") of Ares Commercial Real Estate Corporation (the "Company") is to assist the Board in its oversight of: (1) the integrity of the Company's financial statements; (2) the Company's compliance with legal and regulatory requirements; (3) the qualifications and independence of any independent registered public accounting firm engaged by the Company; and (4) the performance of the Company's internal audit function and any independent registered public accounting firm. However, it is not the duty of the Audit Committee to plan or conduct audits or to determine that the Company's financial statements are complete and accurate, fairly present the information shown or are in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles ("GAAP") and applicable rules and regulations. Nor is it the duty of the Audit Committee to conduct investigations or to assure compliance with any law, regulation or rule of the New York Stock Exchange ("NYSE"), or the Company's Corporate Governance Guidelines or Code of Business Conduct and Ethics. These are the responsibilities of management and the independent registered public accounting firm. Instead, the Audit Committee shall oversee the Company's accounting and financial reporting processes and the audits of the Company's financial statements.

The independent accountants are responsible for performing an independent audit of the Company's financial statements in accordance with the standards of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (United States) and expressing an opinion as to the conformity of such financial statements with GAAP.

The directors that serve on the Audit Committee have reviewed and discussed the Company's audited financial statements with management and with Ernst & Young LLP, the Company's independent registered public accounting firm for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015. The Audit Committee has discussed with Ernst & Young LLP the matters required to be discussed by Auditing Standard No. 16, *Communications with Audit Committees*, as currently in effect (which superseded Statement on Auditing Standards No. 61), as adopted by the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board for audits of fiscal years beginning on or after December 15, 2012. The Audit Committee has received from Ernst & Young LLP the written disclosures and the letter required by applicable requirements of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board Rule 3526, *Communication with Audit Committees Concerning Independence*, regarding the independent accountant's communications with the Audit Committee concerning independence, and has discussed with the independent registered public accounting firm its independence.

The Board has determined that each member of the Audit Committee is independent for purposes of the NYSE Listed Company Manual. The Board has also determined that each member of the Audit Committee is financially literate as required by the NYSE Listed Company Manual, and that William L. Browning has the accounting or related financial management expertise required by the NYSE Listed Company Manual, and is an "audit committee financial expert" within the meaning of the rules and regulations of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC").

Based on the review and discussions referred to above, the Audit Committee has recommended to the Board that the audited consolidated financial statements for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015 be included in the Company's Annual Report on Form 10-K for such year for filing with the SEC.

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In addition, the Audit Committee has approved, and recommended to the Board that it approve, Ernst & Young LLP to serve as the Company's independent registered public accounting firm for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2016 and that the selection of Ernst & Young LLP be submitted to the Company's stockholders for ratification.

### **The Audit Committee**

William L. Browning (Chairperson)

Caroline E. Blakely

John Hope Bryant

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**PROPOSAL 3: APPROVAL, ON A NON-BINDING, ADVISORY BASIS, OF THE RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE COMPENSATION OF THE COMPANY'S NAMED EXECUTIVE OFFICERS**

As required by Section 14A of the Exchange Act, and in accordance with the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010, the Board is providing our stockholders with the opportunity to vote to approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the resolution to approve the compensation of our named executive officers as disclosed in accordance with SEC rules in this proxy statement. This proposal is commonly known as a "say-on-pay" proposal. At the 2013 annual meeting of stockholders, we asked our stockholders to indicate if we should hold an advisory vote on the compensation of our named executive officers every one, two or three years. Because at such 2013 annual meeting of stockholders our stockholders voted in favor of an advisory vote every three years, we again are asking our stockholders to approve the compensation of our named executive officers as disclosed in this proxy statement in accordance with the SEC's rules. The compensation of our named executive officers as disclosed in this proxy statement includes the disclosure under "Compensation Discussion and Analysis," the compensation tables and other narrative executive compensation disclosure in this Proxy Statement, as required by SEC rules.

We are externally managed and advised by our Manager, a SEC registered investment adviser, pursuant to the terms of the management agreement between us and our Manager, dated April 25, 2012, as amended, (the "Management Agreement"). We rely on our Manager to provide us with investment advisory services. Our named executive officers as described in this Proxy Statement are employees of our Manager or one of its affiliates and do not receive cash compensation from us for serving as our executive officers. We do not reimburse our Manager for the salaries and other compensation of its personnel, except for the allocable share of the salaries and other compensation of (a) our Chief Financial Officer, based on the percentage of his time spent on the Company's affairs and (b) other corporate finance, tax, accounting, internal audit, legal, risk management, operations, compliance and other non-investment professional personnel of our Manager or its affiliates who spend all or a portion of their time managing our affairs based on the percentage of their time spent on the Company's affairs. However, we do not determine the compensation payable by our Manager to Mr. Yoon, our Chief Financial Officer, or the other personnel described above. The amounts payable to our Manager pursuant to the Management Agreement that relate to reimbursement of our Manager for the compensation paid by it to our named executive officers are described in more detail under "Compensation Discussion and Analysis" below.

In addition, our Manager and its personnel who support our Manager in providing services to us under the Management Agreement are eligible to receive grants of incentive compensation under our 2012 Equity Incentive Plan. Our named executive officers are also eligible to receive such grants. Please refer to "Compensation Discussion and Analysis" below for a description of grants made under our 2012 Equity Incentive Plan.

Accordingly, the following non-binding, advisory resolution will be presented to our stockholders at the Annual Meeting:

RESOLVED, that the stockholders of the Company approve, on a non-binding, advisory basis, the compensation payable to the Company's named executive officers, as disclosed in the Company's Proxy Statement for the Company's 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders pursuant to Securities and Exchange Commission rules, including the disclosure under "Compensation Discussion and Analysis," the compensation tables and other narrative executive compensation disclosure in the Company's Proxy Statement for the Company's 2016 Annual Meeting of Stockholders.

Although this proposal is advisory and non-binding, the Board and the compensation committee value the opinion of our stockholders and will consider the voting results when making future decisions regarding the compensation of our named executive officers.

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The affirmative vote of at least a majority of the votes cast at the Annual Meeting is required for the approval, on a non-binding, advisory basis, of the resolution to approve the compensation of the Company's named executive officers. The persons named in the accompanying proxy intend to vote proxies received by them in favor of this proposal unless a choice of "Against" or "Abstain" is specified. Abstentions and broker non-votes will not be counted as votes cast and will have no effect on the result of the vote, although they will be considered present for determining the presence of a quorum.

**The Board recommends a vote FOR the approval, on a non-binding, advisory basis, of the resolution to approve the compensation of our named executive officers as disclosed in this Proxy Statement pursuant to Securities and Exchange Commission rules, including the disclosure under "Compensation Discussion and Analysis," the compensation tables and other narrative executive compensation disclosure in this Proxy Statement.**

**CORPORATE GOVERNANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND COMMITTEES**

**Board Leadership Structure**

Our business is managed by our Manager, subject to the supervision and oversight of the Board. A majority of the Board is "independent," as determined by the requirements of the NYSE corporate governance listing requirements and the rules and regulations of the SEC. Our Board has the responsibility for establishing broad corporate policies and for our overall performance and direction, but is not involved in our day-to-day operations. Our directors keep informed about our business by attending meetings of the Board and its committees and through supplemental reports and communications with our Manager and our executive officers. Our non-management directors meet regularly in an executive session without the presence of our officers or management directors to review, among other matters, the performance of our Co-Chief Executive Officers and senior management. In addition, our non-management directors will meet in executive session at other times at the request of any non-management director. Our independent directors also meet in executive session at least once a year. In accordance with the Bylaws and the Corporate Governance Guidelines, the chairperson of the nominating and governance committee currently presides at meetings of the independent directors or non-management directors.

The Board monitors and performs an oversight role with respect to our business and affairs, including with respect to investment practices and performance, compliance with regulatory requirements and the services, expenses and performance of certain of our service providers. Among other things, the Board approves the appointment of our officers and either directly or by delegation to the audit committee or compensation committee reviews and monitors the services and activities performed by our Manager and our officers.

Under the Bylaws, the Board may designate a chairman to preside over the meetings of the Board and meetings of the stockholders and to perform such other duties as may be assigned to him by the Board. We do not have a fixed policy as to whether the chairman of the Board should be an independent director and we believe that our flexibility to select our chairman and reorganize our leadership structure from time to time is in the best interests of our Company and our stockholders.

Presently, Mr. Rosen serves as the Chairman of the Board and as our Interim Co-Chief Executive Officer. We believe that Mr. Rosen's history with our Company, familiarity with the Ares platform, including as an inaugural member of Ares Capital Corporation's (NASDAQ: ARCC) board of directors, and depth of experience as a senior executive and director of financial services, healthcare services, real estate and private equity funds in addition to his previously serving as the chairman of two boards of directors qualifies him to serve as the Chairman of the Board. Moreover, we believe that we are best served through our existing leadership structure with Mr. Rosen as Chairman of the Board, as Mr. Rosen's relationship with Ares provides an effective bridge between the Board and our Manager, thus ensuring an open dialogue between the Board and our Manager and that both groups act with a common purpose.

The Board has formed an audit committee, a nominating and governance committee and a compensation committee and has adopted charters for each of these committees which are available on our website at [www.arescre.com](http://www.arescre.com). Each of the audit committee, compensation committee and the nominating and governance committee currently has three directors, and each is composed exclusively of independent directors, as defined by the NYSE corporate governance listing requirements and the rules of the SEC.

We believe that each board of directors leadership structure must be evaluated on a case by case basis and that our existing Board leadership structure provides sufficient independent oversight over our Manager. In addition, we believe that the current governance structure, when combined with the functioning of the independent director component of the Board and our overall corporate

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governance structure, strikes an appropriate balance between strong and consistent leadership and independent oversight of our business and affairs. However, we continually re-examine our corporate governance policies on an ongoing basis to ensure that they continue to meet our needs.

### **Board Role in Risk Oversight**

The Board performs its risk oversight function primarily through the audit committee, which reports to the entire Board and is comprised solely of independent directors. The audit committee, with input from our Manager and our General Counsel, discusses and reviews our guidelines with respect to risk assessment and risk management, including our major financial risk exposures and the steps management has taken to monitor and control such exposures. In addition, the audit committee's risk oversight responsibilities include overseeing (1) the integrity of our financial statements; (2) our compliance with legal and regulatory requirements; (3) the qualifications and independence of any independent registered public accounting firm engaged by us; and (4) the performance of our internal audit function and our independent registered public accounting firm.

In addition, the Board and the audit committee meet regularly with our Manager and consider the feedback our Manager provides concerning the risks related to our enterprise, business, operations and strategies. Our Manager regularly reports to the Board and the audit committee on our investment portfolio and the risks related thereto, asset impairments, leverage position, affiliate payments (including payments made and expenses reimbursed pursuant to the terms of the Management Agreement), compliance with applicable covenants under the agreements governing our indebtedness, compliance with our qualification as a real estate investment trust for U.S. federal income tax purposes, or "REIT," and compliance with our exemption from registration under the Investment Company Act of 1940, as amended. Members of the Board are routinely in contact with our Manager and our executive officers, as appropriate, in connection with their consideration of matters submitted for the approval of the Board or the audit committee and the risks associated with such matters. As described below in more detail under "Nominating and Governance Committee," the nominating and governance committee also assists the Board in fulfilling its risk oversight responsibilities.

We believe that the extent of the Board's (and its committees') role in risk oversight complements the Board's leadership structure because it allows our independent directors, through the three fully independent Board committees, executive sessions with the independent auditors, and otherwise, to exercise oversight of risk without any conflict that might discourage critical review.

We believe that a board of directors' role in risk oversight must be evaluated on a case by case basis and that the Board's role in risk oversight is appropriate. However, we re-examine the manner in which the Board administers its oversight function on an ongoing basis to ensure that it continues to meet our needs.

### **Number of Meetings of the Board and Attendance in 2015**

During 2015, the Board held nine formal meetings, the audit committee held four formal meetings, the nominating and governance committee held two formal meetings and the compensation committee held three formal meetings. Each director then in office attended at least 75% of the meetings of the Board and of the meetings of the committees of the Board on which such director served. We expect each director serving on the Board to regularly attend meetings of the Board and the committees on which such director serves, and to review, prior to meetings, materials distributed in advance for such meetings. A director who is unable to attend a meeting is expected to notify the Chairman of the Board or the chairperson of the appropriate committee in advance of such meeting. We encourage, but do not require, the directors to attend our annual meetings of stockholders. Six directors attended our 2015 annual meeting of stockholders.

### **Audit Committee**

The members of the audit committee throughout 2015 were Ms. Blakely and Messrs. Browning and Diamond. Mr. Bryant served as a member of the audit committee from January 11, 2016 to April 25, 2016. Ms. Blakely and Messrs. Browning and Skinner are the current members of the audit committee, each of whom is independent for purposes of the NYSE corporate governance listing requirements and rules and regulations of the SEC. Mr. Browning currently serves as Chairperson of the audit committee.

The audit committee is responsible for engaging our independent accountants, reviewing with our independent accountants the plan and results of the audit engagement, approving professional services provided by our independent accountants, reviewing the independence of our independent accountants and reviewing the adequacy of our internal accounting controls. In addition, the audit committee is responsible for discussing with management our major financial risk exposures and the steps management has taken to monitor and control such exposures, including our risk assessment and risk management policies. The specific responsibilities of the audit committee are set forth in its written charter, which is available for viewing on our website at [www.arescre.com](http://www.arescre.com).

The Board has determined that each of Messrs. Browning and Skinner has the accounting or related financial management expertise required by the NYSE Listed Company Manual, and is an "audit committee financial expert" within the meaning of the rules and regulations of the SEC. In addition, the Board has determined that all of the members of the audit committee are financially literate as required by the NYSE Listed Company Manual.

### **Nominating and Governance Committee**

The members of the nominating and governance committee throughout 2015 were Ms. Blakely and Messrs. Bryant and Diamond. Ms. Blakely and Messrs. April and Browning are the current members of the nominating and governance committee, each of whom is independent for purposes of the NYSE corporate governance listing requirements and rules and regulations of the SEC. Ms. Blakely currently serves as Chairperson of the nominating and governance committee.

The nominating and governance committee's responsibilities include identifying individuals qualified to become Board members (consistent with the criteria approved by the Board) and recommending for selection by the Board the director nominees to stand for election at each annual meeting of our stockholders, recommending to the Board director nominees for each committee of the Board, overseeing the evaluation of the Board and its committees, developing and recommending to the Board a set of corporate governance guidelines and recommending to the Board such other matters of corporate governance as the nominating and governance committee deems appropriate. In addition, the nominating and governance committee reviews the independence of Board members and director nominees and monitors all other activities that could interfere with such individuals' duties to us. The specific responsibilities of the nominating and governance committee are set forth in its written charter, which is available for viewing on our website at [www.arescre.com](http://www.arescre.com).