Notional Governance Contracts v2 Audit

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Notional Protocol

V2 Governance Contracts

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The Notional Finance team asked us to review and audit the governance smart contracts of their v2 Protocol. We looked at the codebase and now publish our results.

Scope

We audited commit c37c89c9729b830637558a09b6f22fc6a735da64 of the notional-finance/contracts-v2 repository. In scope were the governance contracts inside contracts/external/governance/ directory:

- GovernorAlpha.sol
- NoteERC20.sol
- Reservoir.sol

We also reviewed the Constants.sol file to the extent it affected the governance contracts, as it is imported by the Governance Constants of file. However, the Constants library has not been reviewed in its entirety, nor all the files dependent on the Constants.sol file. In addition, the NoteERC20 file imports NotionalProxy.sol but the proxy is not yet implemented and is thus out of scope for this audit. Moreover, there are placeholders in the contract which we make note of in our review where relevant. To ensure security, we recommend having the updated code audited once it is ready for review.

All other project's files and directories (including tests), along with external dependencies and projects, game theory, and incentive design, were also excluded from the scope of this audit.

Note: the repository in question is private at the time of writing, so many hyperlinks will only work for the Notional Finance team.

System Overview

Notional is a protocol enabling fixed-term, fixed-rate lending, and borrowing on the Ethereum blockchain through a novel financial primitive named fCash, which provides a mechanism for users to commit to transfers of value at a specific point in the future.

The governance contracts specify an ERC20 token (i.e., NOTE) which is used for proposing upgrades and voting proposals. Votes represented by NOTE owners can be delegated to another address. Proposals have a minimum voting period and follow a timelock delay before being executed. Votes can be proposed by anyone with enough delegated NOTE tokens, and proposers must retain their NOTE balance until successful proposals are executed. A proposal in a non-executed state (include Succeeded and Queued) can be canceled by the guardian for any reason, or by any address if the proposer no longer has a sufficient delegated NOTE token balance.

There is another mechanism implemented by the Reservoir contract that can be funded by the governance and used to continually drip some token to a target until the reservoir balance is depleted. The contract contains immutable variables which are set in its constructor function. These may be deployed by governance at a later date.

Privileged roles

The Notional team will initially administer many aspects of the protocol. In particular, the GovernorAlpha contract defines a guardian address with powers to cancel proposals.

After an initial period, the team intends to use the __abdicate function to discontinue the use of a guardian .

Initially, the protocol will grant the NOTE tokens to certain addresses, and it is not known how many of these and how distributed those funds will be, funds that will count as voting power in future governance proposals.

Security model and trust assumptions

During this audit, we assume the guardian and governance to be trustworthy and act in the best interest of the protocol. We assume that sensitive variables, such as votingDelayBlocks and votingPeriodBlocks are not set or updated to malicious values. We also discuss assumptions made about the unimplemented getUnclaimedVotes in the relevant findings below. We assume the deployment of Reservoir instances by governance is non-malicious.

Summary

Overall, we found the code to be clear to follow and read, with most functions and contracts properly documented. We highly recommend the team to improve the supporting documentation to describe every single contract and function. Moreover, there was a lack of comprehensive tests that could tackle edge scenarios and a coverage report.

Update: The Notional team has addressed the issues identified in this report through the respective pull requests in the audited Github repository.

Critical severity

None.

High severity

[H01] Proposal process could result in the wrong outcome

The NoteERC20 contract keeps track of the voting power that users delegate in order to vote protocol's proposals.

The getPriorVotes function returns the number of votes an account had as of a given block using a binary search over all the available checkpoints. However, under certain cases when the pivot center checkpoint corresponds to the queried block number, meaning that checkpoints[account][center].fromBlock == blockNumber, only the checkpoints[account][center].votes value will be returned. Nevertheless, in all other instances the output will be the sum of the respective checkpoint votes and the value from the getUnclaimedVotes function.

Although the getUnclaimedVotes function has been left out from the current audit's scope by forcing it to return a zero value, its functionality will be implemented in the future. When the getUnclaimedVotes function returns an output different from zero, this discrepancy in the return values in the binary search could be used as an attack vector to alter the result of the election. Consider updating the getPriorVotes function to handle getUnclaimedVotes consistently across all the outcomes.

Update: Fixed in pull request 22.

Medium severity

[MO1] Approval process can be front-run

The ERC-20 standard approve function lets NOTE owners specify a spender that may transfer up to rawAmount tokens from the owner's balance.

The same approve function is used to make changes to this limit imposed on a spender, by calling the function again which replaces the value in the allowances mapping.

Performing a direct overwrite of the value in the allowances mapping is susceptible to front-running scenarios by an attacker (e.g., an approved spender). By monitoring the mempool for changes in the allowances, an attacker could spend both the previous and new allowances limits.

Although this vulnerability is acknowledged in a comment, it is not mitigated. Consider using the safeIncreaseAllowance and the safeDecreaseAllowance methods from the OpenZeppelin's SafeERC20 library.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

_Won't fix, unclear how one would resolve this in the "approve" method without adding the separate atomic increaseAllowance and decreaseAllowance methods. My feeling on this issue is that it has to be dealt with client side anyway (increaseAllowance / decreaseAllowance are non-standard) and if the client is savvy enough to be aware of those methods it can also enforce that the allowance is set to zero before it is increased. Also just from a practical perspective, allowances are generally set to MAXUINT256 or 0 for most apps anyway just to simplify the user experience.

[MO2] Initial NOTE token funds could be lost

The initialization of the NoteERC20 contract requires the initialAccounts array of addresses and initialGrantAmount array of values to assign the grant tokens into their accounts. In the loop through the initialGrantAmount array, all the grants are accumulated in the totalGrants variable, and the initialAccounts accounts are granted their corresponding initialGrantAmount amount by updating their balances.

However, if the deployment transaction has duplicated elements in the initialAccounts array, the totalGrants will represent the sum of all the initialGrantAmount elements, but the balances for those accounts will not reflect the sum of all their grants. This is due to the overwrite operation that it is made to all the balances which will remove all old balances of that duplicated account.

Although this issue could be mitigated by redeploying the contract while bootstrapping the protocol, the effect of the issue

could be more serious in cases where the governance is in charge of updating the NoteERC20 contract through proposals. It could become impossible to vote new proposals or fix the protocol if the available voting power is not enough to pass a new proposal. Consider validating that there are not duplicate values in the initialAccounts array.

Update: Fixed in pull request 23 by checking if the balance is zero before granting tokens to the initial accounts.

[MO3] Lack of event emission after sensitive actions

The following functions do not emit relevant events after executing sensitive actions.

- In the GovernorAlpha contract, the <u>abdicate</u> function does not emit any event when the guardian renounces its role.
- In the Reservoir contract, the drip function does not emit a distinct event besides a regular Transfer event.

Consider emitting events after sensitive changes take place, to facilitate tracking and notify off-chain clients following the contracts' activity.

Update: Fixed in pull request 25.

[MO4] Incomplete set of unit tests

No tests were found for several parts of the features implemented in the contracts and some unit tests were completely empty after its declaration, such as the ones in the test_governance.py file. This is considered a major shortcoming in the project, as there is no way to determine if the current implementation matches the system's expected behavior. Thorough unit tests aiming at 95% coverage are in order for the security of the project to be assessed in a future audit. Integrating test coverage reports in every single pull request of the project is also highly advisable.

Update: Partially fixed in pull request 33. The test file no longer has empty units of tests, although no further cases have been tested.

[MO5] Test coverage script fails to deliver the report

Even though the project uses the Brownie package to automate the tests and compile the contracts, running the script to get the coverage of the tests throughout the codebase ends up in a frozen task without ever delivering the actual code coverage report. Without this report it is impossible to know whether there are parts of the code never executed by the automated tests; so for every change, a full manual test suite has to be executed to make sure that nothing is broken or misbehaving.

Consider fixing and documenting how to run the test coverage scripts and making that coverage reach at least 95% of the source code.

Update: Acknowledged. Notional's statement for this issue:

This is currently an issue with performance limitations in ganache and the way that brownie runs its tests. It's on my list to dig into this in more depth and get it fixed but won't be fixed as a result of this audit.

[M06] Reservoir does not accept ETH

The Reservoir contract has no way to accept ETH, even though governance can execute proposals that handle ETH.

Whether the Reservoir contract should handle ETH or not, for instance by using WETH instead of ETH, this expectation should be properly documented. Consider either implementing the functionality to allow the Reservoir contract to handle and drip ETH or documenting the reasons behind this choice.

Update: Fixed in pull request 24 by adding documentation about the design choice.

[MO7] Mistakenly deposited tokens in Reservoir would get stuck

The Reservoir contract allows the protocol to distribute a token at a fixed rate, predominantly to the protocol's reserve, by dripping them every so often.

The parameters involved in the process are set during the deployment of the contract and it is not possible to modify them afterwards.

Because this contract may be deployed several times to drip a variety of tokens at the same time, it is possible that during the process a certain tokenA could be sent by mistake to a Reservoir contract that only handles a tokenB. In such scenario, all the tokenA funds sent to that contract will get stuck due to the impossibility of withdrawing/transferring them to any other address.

Consider implementing the functionality to withdraw or transfer those tokens, different from the TOKEN token, to the reserve to prevent that funds could get trapped inside the Reservoir contract.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix, the intention is to only use the reservoir for NOTE tokens.

[MO8] Untested custom SafeMath library in use

The GovernorAlpha and the NoteERC20 contracts make use of a SafeMath alike library embedded into the contracts based on OpenZeppelin's SafeMath library, customized to support safe mathematical operations for unsigned integers of 32 and 96 bits. Yet, none of the functions in the implemented SafeMath library are tested, which may hinder users and developers' trust in this custom library. Moreover, any change in the library is not going to be detected by the current test suite, rendering all business logic depending on it vulnerable to potential security issues introduced by these future modifications.

Consider including thorough and extensive unit tests for the SafeMath library.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix, have manually tested that the methods don't overflow.

[M09] Variables are not initialized

In the NoteERC20 contract a for statement is used to distribute the grant tokens between all the initial accounts.

However, the index i used to cycle among all the elements is not initialized with zero and its default value is used instead. Relying on the default value of a variable is not a recommended and secure methodology to perform due to the unexpected effects that may occur when this is not true, whether it is the result of a compilation bug or the outcome of a security issue.

Similarly, during the contract initialization, the totalGrants variable is used as a counter for all the distributed grant tokens but it is not initialized with a zero value before its usage.

Consider initializing all variables, specially indexes and counters, that will use their initial value during operation.

Update: Fixed in pull request 23.

Low severity

[L01] Users can emit Approval and VoteCast events to deceive offline services

The NoteERC20 contract implements the functionalities of the NOTE token that allow users to delegate their voting power and vote proposals. However, if a non-allowed user tries to transfer zero number of tokens on behalf of another another account by calling the transferFrom function, the transaction will not only succeed but will also emit both the Transfer and Approval events, allowing a malicious user to disguise this harmless transaction as an approval on a non-owned account.

Similarly, in the GovernorAlpha contract, the _castVote function can also be successfully used by an user that does not have any voting power to submit their vote, resulting in the emission of the VoteCast event.

Although these situations will not impact in the voting's result nor the users' balances, the emission of these Approval and VoteCast events may be used to spam offline services, to confuse users, or to perform phishing attacks. Consider either requiring non-zero values in those functions to prevent users from being deceived and to improve the readability of off-chain services that track event logs, or documenting and letting the users know about this possible attack.

Update: Fixed on pull request 26. However, the changes has broken the ERC20 compliant token compatibility because no Transfer event is emitted on zero value transfers. Consider emitting the Transfer event on such cases.

[LO2] Lack of guardian-role transfer

The guardian address from the GovernorAlpha contract has a special role inside the system.

However, if the address associated with the guardian gets compromised, there is no way to transfer those special roles to another address.

Consider creating a function to transfer the guardian role to another address or consider documenting this limitation.

Update: Fixed in pull request 30.

[L03] Implicit casting

Throughout the codebase, many instances of implicit casting between types exist.

Some examples of such behavior can be found in the NoteERC20.sol file on:

- Line 96 where the each element of the initialGrantAmount is being casted in the Transfer event.
- Line 99 where an implicit casting on the granted amount occurs when it is being compared to the total supply.
- Line 107 where the allowance in uint96 for a pair of accounts is casted into uint256 by the return operation.
- Line 127 where the amount value is casted in the Approval event.
- Line 135 where the balance in uint96 is casted into uint256 by the return operation.

Whenever a different type of variable is needed, consider either checking and casting the variable into the desired type or using OpenZeppelin's SafeCast library which provides overflow checking when casting from one type of number to another.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix this, it adds to gas costs to do this checking and since we are casting to larger unsigned sizes I don't see a potential overflow issue.

[LO4] Misleading comments

Throughout the codebase there are cases of misleading or inaccurate documentation. Some examples are:

• The description of the dripRate_ parameter for the Reservoir constructor claims to be "tokens per block", but the implementation is actually "tokens per second" as described in the DRIP_RATE variable.

• The documentation for the quorumVotes parameter state that "for a vote to succeed" although it should be either "for a voting process to succeed" or "for a proposal to succeed".

Consider fixing these and all misleading comments in the codebase to improve the code's readability.

Update: Fixed in pull request 27.

[L05] Lack of input validation

Several external functions fail to validate the input parameters supplied. For example:

- The initialization of the Reservoir contract completely lacks input validation, such as validating whether the token_address corresponds to a real contract and whether the dripRate_value is greater than zero.
- The notionalProxy_ address from the NoteERC20 contract does not check if that address corresponds to a contract's address.
- The constructor function from the GovernorAlpha contract does not check if the note_address corresponds to a contract's address. Moreover, the quorumVotes_, the proposalThreshold_, the votingDelayBlocks_, and the votingPeriodBlocks_ values are not being check in any sense, which could result in the ability to vote a proposal without the need of voting power, the inability to vote a proposal if the voting period is zero, or the inability to pass a proposal due to a shortage of needed voting power, among other outcomes.
- Similarly, in the GovernorAlpha contract, the updateQuorumVotes, the updateProposalThreshold, the updateVotingDelayBlocks, and the updateVotingPeriodBlocks functions lack of input validation, which may cause the outcomes mentioned above.

To avoid errors and unexpected system behavior, consider explicitly restricting the range of inputs that can be accepted for all externally-provided inputs via require clauses where appropriate. For all cases of contract's addresses, consider using the OpenZeppelin's Address library to check that the input address corresponds to a contract's address.

Update: Partially fixed in pull request 32. Some of the protocol's parameters are still not checked against a zero value. Furthermore, the code does not enforce validation over the voting period due to conflicts with the tests. Notional's statement for this issue:

No validation is done for quorumVotes, proposalThreshold and votingDelayBlocks because it is not clear what values would be reasonable minimums or maximums there.

[L06] Missing and / or incomplete docstrings

Some contracts and functions in the code base lack documentation or include incomplete descriptions. This hinders reviewers' understanding of the code's intention, which is fundamental to correctly assess not only security, but also correctness. Additionally, docstrings improve readability and ease maintenance. They should explicitly explain the purpose or intention of the functions, the scenarios under which they can fail, the roles allowed to call them, the values returned, and the events emitted. Below we list all instances detected during the audit.

In the Constants library:

 Several constants lack their documentation stating its purpose and the reason of its value, such as the FCASH_ASSET_TYPE constant.

In the GovernorAlpha contract:

- The getReceipt function is missing a docstring for the return value.
- The state function contains an incomplete docstring for the return value.

- The updateQuorumVotes function is missing all its documentation.
- The updateProposalThreshold function is missing all its documentation.
- The updateVotingDelayBlocks function is missing all its documentation.
- The updateVotingPeriodBlocks function is missing all its documentation.
- The constructor function is missing all its documentation.

Consider thoroughly documenting all functions (and their parameters) that are part of the contracts' public API. Functions implementing sensitive functionality, even if not public, should be clearly documented as well. When writing docstrings, consider following the Ethereum Natural Specification Format (NatSpec).

Update: Partially fixed in pull request 27. No documentation has been added to the Constants library, such as on the FCASH_ASSET_TYPE constant.

[L07] Not using SafeMath functions

Although several parts of the codebase employs its custom SafeMath methods where appropriate, there are still a few instances of regular Solidity arithmetic operators being used. Some examples are:

- On line 191 of GovernorAlpha.sol a + is used.
- On line 56 of Reservoir.sol a is used.
- On line 221 of NoteERC20.sol a is used.
- On line 244 of NoteERC20.sol a is used.
- On line 245 of NoteERC20.sol a is used.
- On line 254 of NoteERC20.sol a is used.
- On line 361 of NoteERC20.sol a is used.
- On line 365 of NoteERC20.sol a + is used.

Although these cases do not represent a security risk per se, consider always performing arithmetic operations with methods that protect the system from such possibilities, like the math libraries of OpenZeppelin contracts.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix, overflow in any of these cases is highly unlikely

[L08] Transfer of ERC20 tokens do not use SafeERC20

The drip function from the Reservoir contract transfers a fix-rate of ERC-20 tokens to a target address based on its deployment parameters. The transfer call used is then checked for success. However, some ERC-20 compliant tokens may not return a boolean.

To handle a broader variety of tokens, consider using the safeTransfer method from the OpenZeppelin's SafeERC20 library as an alternative.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix, there's no intention of expanding the use case beyond NOTE tokens

[L09] Proposals never reach the Queued state

The state function from the GovernorAlpha contract is used to return the current state of any proposal. The possible states are stored in the ProposalState enum and the proposals mapping contains a record of all proposals data in any state.

Due to the logic used for determining the Succeeded state, a queued proposal will never be able to reach the Queued state, even after the queueProposal function has been called.

Although the state function is not currently used to determine whether a proposal is Queued or not, changes to this, other contracts, or any other project that rely on the ProposalState being Queued may be vulnerable to future attacks. Consider revising the way the state function identifies a proposal as Queued and warning users about this behavior.

Update: Fixed in pull request 31. The state function now validates if the proposal is queued by checking if it is still pending.

[L10] Re-implementing ECDSA signature recovery

The castVoteBySig function from the GovernorAlpha contract and the delegateBySig function from the NoteERC20 contract include an implementation of the ECDSA signature recovery function. This function is already part of the OpenZeppelin contracts, which has been audited and is constantly reviewed by the community.

Consider importing and using the recover function from OpenZeppelin's ECDSA library not only to benefit from bug fixes to be applied in future releases, but also to reduce the code's attack surface.

Update: Fixed in pull request 28. However, because the OpenZeppelin's ECDSA library already checks if the outcome is the zero address, the same validation from the GovernorAlpha contract is redundant. Consider removing it. The same note applies to the respective case in the NoteERC20 contract.

[L11] Proposal execution not handling returned data

The executeProposal function from the GovernorAlpha contract allows any user to execute a proposal from the timelock queue once the delay has passed. This is accomplished through the executeBatch function from OpenZeppelin's TimelockController contract.

Currently the executeBatch function does not handle data returned by executed transactions. Although OpenZeppelin plans to implement this soon in the TimelockController contract, consider extending the functionality in order to handle return data from the proposals' execution.

Update: Acknowledged. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix, will use the OZ implementation when it is ready. It's not clear how a set of governance proposals will actually use return data during a batch of transaction executions.

[L12] Unnecessary return statements

The delegate and delegateBySig functions use return when calling the _delegate function. However, because the _delegate function does not return any output, these return statements are needless.

To avoid confusion and improve the code's readability, consider removing the unnecessary return statements from the code.

Update: Fixed in pull request 28.

Notes & Additional Information

[NO1] Event parameters are not indexed

Throughout the codebase, there was a lack of index used on event parameters. For example, the VoteCast and ProposalQueued event parameters are not indexed. Consider indexing event parameters so event logs are easier to be queried and used by offline services.

Update: Fixed in pull request 29.

[NO2] Gas Optimizations

The executeProposal function from the GovernorAlpha contract starts the process to enact all the transactions corresponding to a proposal by calling the executeBatch function from the OpenZeppelin's TimelockController contract through the executeBatch function. However, if the proposal is still queued, the transaction will revert just before the end while checking the timelock, instead of failing early before several calls to contracts are made.

Consider reviewing the codebase for such occurrences and refactoring by returning or failing earlier for gas efficiency.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix, will just rely on the client to check that this works before submitting.

[NO3] Inconsistent coding style

Some instances of inconsistent coding style and style guide deviations were identified in the code base. Specifically:

- The GovernorAlpha contract inherits the functionality of the OpenZeppelin's TimeLockController contract. If a proposal is cancelled, the contract will trigger two events as shown in the documentation. However, the names of the events are spelled in different English styles. To improve the codebase's consistency, the name of the event from the GovernorAlpha contract should be changed to match its equivalent event in the TimeLockController contract.
- The functions in the GovernorAlpha contract do not follow the recommended order of: constructor, fallback, external, public, internal, private. For example, the private _computeHash function comes before the external queueProposal function.
- The GovernorAlpha contract checks if the current block number fits inside a uint32 variable type in order to prevent errors due to its internal accounting system. The NoteERC20 contract also performs this check by using a dedicated function in several places of the code. However, the GovernorAlpha contract does not perform this check in all places where the block number is used, such as in the cancelProposal or the state functions.
- Constants should follow the UPPER_CASE notation. Some deviations were identified, such as the name and proposalMaxOperations constants.
- For long function declarations, such as castVoteBySig, consider putting the opening brace on it's own line.
- For functions with lots of arguments, such as hashOperationBatch, consider dropping each argument onto it's own line.
- The GovernorAlpha.sol file implements a minimal interface for the NoteERC20 contract which is then used by the GovernorAlpha contract. However, the NoteInterface name does not follow the usual naming style for interfaces, which should be INoteERC20. Furthermore, this interface is placed inside the same file where the contract that uses it is, instead of importing the respective interface's file at the beginning of the file.
- Some revert messages in the GovernorAlpha contract do not follow the same style as other revert messages in the same contract.
- GoverorAlpha provides "" as the optional predecessor argument for hashOperationBatch, instead of the recommended bytes32(0).

To favor readability, consider always following a consistent style throughout the code base. We suggest using Solidity's Style Guide as a reference with the help of linter tools such as Solhint.

Update: Partially fixed on pull request 29. Issue has been updated based on the team's response. Further Notional's statements for this issue:

Won't fix, prefer to have internal / private methods near the functions where they are referenced for readability

Won't fix name as it is used as a public getter as well

Won't fix, not compatible with with prettier config

Won't fix revert messages

[NO4] Proposal states overlap during voting expiry

The GovernorAlpha contract implements the state function that outputs the current state of a proposal.

However, there are two states that overlap their conditions during the expiration of the voting period: the Active and the Succeeded states.

Although this does not represent a security issue, because the first conditional to be checked will be the Active state, having two overlapped states may render the code's readability when transactions are sent during expiry.

Consider restricting the Succeeded state to be active when the block number is strictly greater than the endBlock value.

Update: Fixed in pull request 29.

[NO5] Revert messages statements are missing

Some require statements are missing their respective revert messages. For example:

- line 160 in GovernorAlpha.sol.
- line 88 in NoteERC20.sol
- line 93 in NoteERC20.sol.
- line 99 in NoteERC20.sol.

To improve the code's readability and to help debugging issues that may arise, consider always including revert messages in all require statements.

Update: Acknowledged, and will not fix. Notional's statement for this issue:

Won't fix, require strings add to deployed code size which increase gas costs for users. Initialize will only be called once so this is a fair trade off.

[NO6] Unused import

The GovernorAlpha contract imports Constants.sol, but does not use it. To improve readability and avoid confusion, consider removing unused imports.

Update: Fixed in pull request 29.

Conclusions

1 high severity issue was found. Several changes and recommendations were proposed to reduce the code's attack surface and improve its overall quality.

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