

made out of those plans. At December 31, 2023, the Company had stock options and RSUs outstanding that covered 1,445,256 shares under the Long Term Incentive Plan, and there were 835,076 shares available for future grant under this plan.

Stock compensation expense recognized during the period is based on the value of the portion of share-based payment awards that is ultimately expected to vest during the period. Vesting requirements vary for directors, officers and key employees. In general, options or RSUs granted to outside directors vest six months from the date of grant and options granted to officers and key employees straight line vest over a three- to five-year period from the date of grant. RSUs granted to officers and key employees generally cliff vest three years from the date of grant.

The following table provides compensation expense information based on the fair value of stock options and RSUs for the years ended December 31 as follows:

(In thousands)	2023	2022	2021
Equity-based Compensation Expense	\$ 7,198	\$ 6,497	\$ 6,460
Tax Benefit	(1,259)	(1,068)	(924)
Equity-based Compensation Expense, Net of Tax	<u>\$ 5,939</u>	<u>\$ 5,429</u>	<u>\$ 5,536</u>

Tax benefit excludes the impact of valuation allowances recorded against deferred tax assets.

Stock Options

	2023	2022	2021
Weighted Average Fair Value of the Options Granted	\$ 8.39	\$ 5.97	\$ 7.05

The weighted average fair value for these options was estimated at the date of grant using a Black-Scholes option pricing model with the following assumptions:

	2023	2022	2021
Risk-free Interest Rate	4.20% - 4.33%	3.48% - 3.62%	0.45% - 1.52%
Dividend Yield	—%	—%	—%
Volatility Factor	0.58	0.61	0.58
Expected Life in Years	3 - 7 years	5 - 9 years	5 - 10 years

To determine expected volatility, the Company uses historical volatility based on weekly closing prices of its Common Stock and considers currently available information to determine if future volatility is expected to differ over the expected terms of the options granted. The risk-free rate is based on the U.S. Treasury yield curve at the time of grant for the appropriate term of the options granted. Expected dividends are based on the Company's history and expectation of dividend payouts. The expected term of stock options is based on vesting schedules, expected exercise patterns and contractual terms.

A summary of the Company's stock option activity and related information for the year ended December 31 is as follows:

		2023	
(Aggregate intrinsic value in thousands)	Options	Weighted Average Exercise Price	Aggregate Intrinsic Value
Outstanding at January 1	1,376,718	\$ 20.37	\$ —
Options Granted	125,400	\$ 15.15	\$ —
Options Exercised	(6,570)	\$ 12.64	\$ —
Options Forfeited / Expired	(84,564)	\$ 28.23	\$ —
Outstanding at December 31	<u>1,410,984</u>	<u>\$ 19.47</u>	<u>\$ —</u>
Exercisable at December 31	<u>860,637</u>	<u>\$ 23.42</u>	<u>\$ —</u>

The aggregate intrinsic value in the preceding table represents the total pretax option holder's intrinsic value, based on the closing stock price of the Company's Common Stock which would have been received by the option holders had all option holders exercised their options as of that date. The closing stock price of the Company's Common Stock was \$17.42, \$10.30 and \$12.00 as of December 31, 2023, 2022 and 2021, respectively. As the stock price of \$17.42 was below the weighted average exercise price, intrinsic value is zero.