



KEN PAXTON  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

January 4, 2017

Ms. Andrea D. Russell  
Counsel for the City of Southlake  
Taylor Olson Adkins Sralla Elam, L.L.P.  
6000 Western Place, Suite 200  
Fort Worth, Texas 76107-4654

OR2017-00147

Dear Ms. Russell:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 640345.

The City of Southlake (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for all written information from any city staff member related to a specified incident and related to any personnel complaints relating to a specified location during a specified time period.<sup>1</sup> You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.107 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.107(1) of the Government Code protects information coming within the attorney-client privilege. When asserting the attorney-client privilege, a governmental body has the burden of providing the necessary facts to demonstrate the elements of the privilege in order to withhold the information at issue. Open Records Decision No. 676 at 6-7 (2002). First, a governmental body must demonstrate that the information constitutes or documents

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<sup>1</sup>We note the city sought and received clarification of the information requested. See Gov't Code § 552.222 (providing if request for information is unclear, governmental body may ask requestor to clarify request); see also *City of Dallas v. Abbott*, 304 S.W.3d 380, 387 (Tex. 2010) (holding when governmental entity, acting in good faith, requests clarification of unclear or overbroad request for public information, ten-business-day period to request attorney general opinion is measured from date request is clarified or narrowed).

a communication. *Id.* at 7. Second, the communication must have been made “to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services” to the client governmental body. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). The privilege does not apply when an attorney or representative is involved in some capacity other than that of providing or facilitating professional legal services to the client governmental body. *In re Tex. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 990 S.W.2d 337, 340 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 1999, orig. proceeding) (attorney-client privilege does not apply if attorney acting in a capacity other than that of attorney). Governmental attorneys often act in capacities other than that of professional legal counsel, such as administrators, investigators, or managers. Thus, the mere fact that a communication involves an attorney for the government does not demonstrate this element. Third, the privilege applies only to communications between or among clients, client representatives, lawyers, and lawyer representatives. TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E). Thus, a governmental body must inform this office of the identities and capacities of the individuals to whom each communication at issue has been made. Lastly, the attorney-client privilege applies only to a *confidential* communication, *id.* 503(b)(1), meaning it was “not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those: (A) to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client; or (B) reasonably necessary to transmit the communication.” *Id.* 503(a)(5). Whether a communication meets this definition depends on the *intent* of the parties involved at the time the information was communicated. *Osborne v. Johnson*, 954 S.W.2d 180, 184 (Tex. App.—Waco 1997, orig. proceeding). Moreover, because the client may elect to waive the privilege at any time, a governmental body must explain that the confidentiality of a communication has been maintained. Section 552.107(1) generally excepts an entire communication that is demonstrated to be protected by the attorney-client privilege unless otherwise waived by the governmental body. *See Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein).

You state the submitted information consists of communications between and among city attorneys and city staff made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of legal services. You also indicate these communications were intended to be confidential and that the confidentiality has been maintained. Upon review, we find the city has demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the submitted information. Thus, the city may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. We note, however, one of these e-mail strings includes an e-mail received from a party with whom you have not demonstrated the city shares a privileged relationship. Furthermore, if the e-mail received from the non-privileged party is removed from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which it appears and stands alone, it is responsive to the request for information. Therefore, if the non-privileged e-mail, which we marked, is maintained by the city separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which it appears, then the city may not withhold the non-privileged e-mail under section 552.107(1).


Section 552.137 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “an e-mail address of a member of the public that is provided for the purpose of communicating electronically with a governmental body” unless the member of the public consents to its release or the e-mail address is of a type specifically excluded by subsection (c).<sup>2</sup> See Gov’t Code § 552.137(a)-(c). Accordingly, the city must withhold the personal e-mail address, which we marked, under section 552.137, unless the individual to whom the e-mail address belongs affirmatively consents to its release. See *id.* § 552.137(b).

In summary, the city may generally withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. If the non-privileged e-mail we have marked is maintained by the city separate and apart from the otherwise privileged e-mail string in which it appears, then the city may not withhold this information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code. The city must withhold the e-mail address we marked under section 552.137 of the Government Code, unless the individual to whom the e-mail address belongs affirmatively consents to its release. The city must release the remaining information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl\\_ruling\\_info.shtml](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml), or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Ashley Crutchfield  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

AC/bw

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<sup>2</sup>The Office of the Attorney General will raise mandatory exceptions on behalf of a governmental body, but ordinarily will not raise other exceptions. See Open Records Decision Nos. 481 (1987), 480 (1987), 470 (1987).

Ref: ID# 640345

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)