May 1, 2017

Ms. Sheri Russell
City Attorney
Office of the City Attorney
City of Lake Jackson
5B Oak Drive
Lake Jackson, Texas 77566-5289

OR2017-09279

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# 656078 (PIR No. W002818-02317).

The City of Lake Jackson (the “city”) received a request for information related to a specified traffic accident. You state you have released some information to the requestor. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the submitted information includes a CR-3 accident report. Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information subject to chapter 550 of the Transportation Code. Section 550.065 applies only to a written report of an accident required under section 550.061, 550.062, or 601.004. Transp. Code § 550.065(a)(1). Chapter 550 requires the creation of a written report when the accident resulted in injury to or the death of a person or damage to the property of any person to the apparent extent of $1,000 or more. Id. §§ 550.061 (operator’s accident report), .062 (officer’s accident report).
An accident report is privileged and for the confidential use of the Texas Department of Transportation or a local governmental agency of Texas that has use for the information for accident prevention purposes. Id. § 550.065(b). However, a governmental entity shall release an accident report in accordance with subsections (c) and (c-1). Id. § 550.065(c), (c-1).

Section 550.065(c) provides a governmental entity shall release an accident report to a person or entity listed under this subsection. Id. § 550.065(c). In this instance, the requestor may be a person listed under section 550.065(c). Accordingly, although the city asserts section 552.108 to withhold the information, a statutory right of access prevails over the Act’s general exceptions to public disclosure. See, e.g., Open Records Decision Nos. 613 at 4 (1993) (exceptions in Act cannot impinge on statutory right of access to information), 451 (1986) (specific statutory right of access provisions overcome general exception to disclosure under the Act). Because section 552.108 is a general exception under the Act, to the extent she has a right of access, the requestor’s statutory access under section 550.065(c) prevails and the city may not withhold the information under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Thus, to the extent the requestor is a person listed under section 550.065(c), the city must release the accident report to the requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c).

To the extent the requestor is not a person listed under section 550.065(c), the submitted accident report is confidential under section 550.065(b), and the city must withhold it under section 552.101 of the Government Code. However, section 550.065(c-1) requires the city to create a redacted accident report that may be requested by any person. Trans. Code § 550.065(c-1). The redacted accident report may not include the information listed in subsection (f)(2). Id. Therefore, if the requestor is not a person listed under section 550.065(c), the requestor has a right of access to the redacted accident report. As noted above, although the city asserts section 552.108 to withhold the information, a statutory right of access prevails over the Act’s general exceptions to public disclosure, and the city may not withhold the information under section 552.108. See, e.g., ORDs 613 at 4, 451. Thus, if the requestor is not a person listed under section 550.065(c), the city must release the redacted accident report to the requestor pursuant to section 550.065(c-1).

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime.” Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body claiming section 552.108(a)(1) must explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. See id. §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); see also Ex parte Pruitt, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state the information at issue relates to criminal prosecution that was ongoing at the time of the request. Based on your representation and our review, we find release of the remaining information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. See Houston Chronicle Pub’g Co.
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v. City of Houston, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, section 552.108(a)(1) is applicable to the remaining information.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure “basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime.” Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Section 552.108(c) refers to the basic information held to be public in Houston Chronicle. See 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; see also Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). We note basic information includes, among other items, the vehicles involved, if any, and the names of investigating officers. See ORD 127 at 3-4. Accordingly, with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In summary, if the requestor is a party listed under section 550.065(c), then the city must release the CR-3 accident report pursuant to section 550.065(c) of the Transportation Code. If the requestor is not a party listed under section 550.065(c), then the accident report must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 550.065(b) of the Transportation Code; however, the city must release a redacted accident report to the requestor pursuant to section 550.665(c-1) of the Transportation Code. With the exception of basic information, which must be released, the city may withhold the remaining information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

Finally, the city asks us to issue a previous determination permitting the city to withhold information subject to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code without the necessity of requesting an attorney general opinion. See id. § 552.301(a) (allowing governmental body to withhold information subject to previous determination); Houston Chronicle v. Mattox, 767 S.W.2d 695, 698 (Tex. 1989) (acknowledging this office has authority under section 552.301 of the Government Code to decide what constitutes a previous determination); Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (describing the two types of previous determinations). We note section 552.011 of the Government Code states “[t]he attorney general shall maintain uniformity in the application, operation, and interpretation” of the Act, chapter 552 of the Government Code. Gov’t Code § 552.011. Pursuant to this legislative mandate, section 552.011 grants the attorney general the authority to “prepare, distribute, and publish any materials, including detailed and comprehensive written decisions and opinions, that relate to or are based on” the Act. Id. We further note the Act requires governmental bodies to promptly release public information requested under the Act within a reasonable time, without delay. Id. § 552.221(a); Open Records Decision No. 664 at 5 (2000).

With the foregoing in mind and upon due consideration, we issue this ruling, which constitutes a previous determination allowing the city to withhold certain information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code without the necessity of first requesting an attorney general decision, so long as the city has not previously received a request for the
information from the same requestor in the manner described below. See ORD 673. This decision is intended to encourage the prompt release of requested public information by increasing the efficiency of the review process under the Act by clearly identifying information the city may withhold under the circumstances delineated below. See Gov't Code §§ 552.011, .221; Open Records Decision Nos. 684 (2009), 673.

Accordingly, the city may withhold certain information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code without the necessity of first requesting a ruling from this office in the following circumstances:

1. the city makes a good faith determination that the information at issue relates to the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime, and the release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of an open or pending criminal matter;

2. the city will release at least the basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime (the "releasable information") from the requested information;

3. the city will produce the releasable information to the requestor pursuant to the requirements of the Act within five business days after the date the request for information was received;

4. the city will provide the requestor with the notice included in Appendix A of this ruling when the city responds to the request pursuant to the requirements of this previous determination; and

5. the city has not previously received a request for the same information from the same requestor after the city has provided the requestor with the releasable information.

See Gov't Code § 552.011. If any of the above circumstances change—or any other law, facts, or circumstances involving the requestor or the status of the requested information changes—the city may not rely upon this ruling as a previous determination to withhold the information at issue. See ORD 673 at 7. Additionally, the city may not rely on this previous determination in response to requests in which basic information is not responsive. For example, no basic information is at issue in a request for only a dashboard camera video recording or 9-1-1 call audio recording. Thus, the city may not rely upon this previous determination in response to those types of requests. Furthermore, this previous determination does not apply to situations in which other law may require some or all of the information at issue to be disclosed. See, e.g., Crim. Proc. Code arts. 2.139 (detailing right of access to videos made in connection with various types of driving while intoxicated offenses), 2.29 (detailing right of access to written report to law enforcement agency of
alleged violation of Penal Code section 32.51); Gov’t Code §§ 411.081-.1410 (detailing rights of access to criminal history record information), 560.002(1)(A) (detailing rights of access to fingerprints and other biometric identifiers); Transp. Code §§ 550.065 (detailing rights of access to crash report forms), 724.018 (detailing right of access to blood or breath specimen analysis results). We also note this previous determination does not permit the disclosure of basic information in those instances in which the entirety of the information at issue must be withheld. See, e.g., Fam. Code §§ 58.007 (detailing circumstances under which certain information related to juvenile offenders must be withheld in its entirety), 261.201 (detailing circumstances under which certain information related to investigations of child abuse or neglect must be withheld in its entirety); Open Records Decision No. 393 (1983) (stating, because the identifying information of a sexual assault victim was inextricably intertwined with other releasable information, the governmental body was required to withhold the information in its entirety). We further note this previous determination does not permit the city to withhold citations; DIC-24 statutory warnings; DIC-25 notices of suspension; criminal trespass warnings; notices of code violations; triplicate forms; or information subject to section 552.007 or section 552.022 of the Government Code, other than information subject to section 552.022(a)(1). See Gov’t Code §§ 552.007, .022(a)(1)-(18), .108(a)(1). However, the use of this previous determination does not preclude the city from withholding information pursuant to other statutory authority or previous determinations that apply to the city. See, e.g., id. §§ 552.1175(f), .130(c), .136(c), .147(b); ORD 684.

If the city’s use of this previous determination does not fall within all of the circumstances delineated above, the requirements of the Act apply, including section 552.301 of the Government Code, and deadlines under the Act run from the date the city received the initial written request for information. See Gov’t Code § 552.301(a); Mattox, 767 S.W.2d at 698. Consequently, misapplication of this previous determination may result in the presumption the requested information is public. See Gov’t Code § 552.302. Thus, if the city is unsure as to the applicability of this previous determination to information responsive to a request for information, the city should request a ruling from this office. Additionally, this office may modify or withdraw this previous determination for any reason, including, but not limited to, misapplication of this previous determination. See id. § 552.011; Mattox, 767 S.W.2d at 698; see also Open Records Decision Nos. 485 at 3 (1987), 673 at 5. Finally, if the city later requests a ruling from this office in response to a second request for the same information from the same requestor, the city should notify this office it relied upon this previous determination in its response to the initial request.

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, 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,

[Signature]

Joseph Behnke
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JB/som

Ref: ID# 656078

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
   (w/o enclosures)
Appendix A

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NOTICE:

On [date], we received your public information request for [description of information requested], dated [date request written] (the “request”). In order to promote governmental efficiency and encourage the prompt release of information, as required by the Public Information Act, we have relied upon Open Records Letter No. 2017-09279 (2017) in responding to your request. We do so within five business days of your request.

The city has made a good faith determination the information you requested:

- deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime and the release of the records would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of an open or pending criminal matter.

This information is subject to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code. The city has also determined you have not previously requested this information. Therefore, pursuant to the previous determination granted by the Office of the Attorney General in Open Records Letter No. 2017-09279, the city is releasing some information to you, and is withholding the remaining responsive information subject to section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

Please note, we are withholding the following specified types of information:

☐ Incident report (except basic information)  ☐ Other: (specify documents withheld)
☐ Witness/suspect interview(s)  
☐ Video recording(s)  
☐ Audio recording(s)

If you have questions regarding the use of this previous determination, please call the city at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or for more information concerning your rights and the responsibilities of the city, please visit the Office of the Attorney General’s website at https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/og/information-about-552.108a1-previous-determinations, or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. You may also review general information about the Public Information Act, including the types of information included in basic information, in the 2016 Public Information Handbook at http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/files/og/publicinfo_hb.pdf.

1If you request this information a second time, the city must request a ruling from the Office of the Attorney General (the “OAG”) in order to withhold the information. See Open Records Letter No. 2017-09279.