



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

June 7, 2017

Ms. Mayra Gonzales
City Secretary
City of Galena Park
P.O. Box 46
Galena Park, Texas 77547

OR2017-12525

Dear Ms. Gonzales:

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# 661033.

The City of Galena Park (the "city") received a request for a specified contract. Although you take no position as to whether the submitted information is excepted under the Act, you state release of the submitted information may implicate the proprietary interests of Texas Solid Waste Services, Inc. ("TSWS").¹ Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified TSWS of the request for information and of its right to submit arguments to this office as to why the submitted information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception in the Act in certain circumstances). We have

¹We note the city did not comply with section 552.301 of the Government Code in requesting this decision. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Nevertheless, because the interests of third parties can provide a compelling reason to overcome the presumption of openness, we will consider the submitted arguments for the submitted information. *See id.* §§ 552.007, .302, .352.

received comments from TSWS. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure “information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder.”² Gov’t Code § 552.104(a). In considering whether a private third party may assert this exception, the supreme court reasoned because section 552.305(a) of the Government Code includes section 552.104 as an example of an exception that involves a third party’s property interest, a private third party may invoke this exception. *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831 (Tex. 2015). The “test under section 552.104 is whether knowing another bidder’s [or competitor’s information] would be an advantage, not whether it would be a decisive advantage.” *Id.* at 841. TSWS states it has competitors. In addition, TSWS states release of this information would provide their competitors with a substantial advantage in the marketplace. For many years, this office concluded the terms of a contract and especially the pricing of a winning bidder are public and generally not excepted from disclosure. Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(3) (contract involving receipt or expenditure of public funds expressly made public); Open Records Decision Nos. 541 at 8 (1990) (public has interest in knowing terms of contract with state agency), 514 (1988) (public has interest in knowing prices charged by government contractors), 494 (1988) (requiring balancing of public interest in disclosure with competitive injury to company). *See generally* Freedom of Information Act Guide & Privacy Act Overview, 219 (2000) (federal cases applying analogous Freedom of Information Act reasoning that disclosure of prices charged government is a cost of doing business with government). However, now, pursuant to *Boeing*, section 552.104 is not limited to only ongoing competitive situations, and a third party need only show release of its competitively sensitive information would give an advantage to a competitor even after a contract is executed. *Boeing*, 466 S.W.3d at 831, 839. After review of the information at issue and consideration of the arguments, we find TSWS has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, we conclude the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.104(a).

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, or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for

²Although TSWS does not explicitly raise section 552.104 of the Government Code, we understand it to do so based on its arguments.

providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Kunst". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emily Kunst
Attorney
Open Records Division

EK/eb

Ref: ID# 661033

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)