



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

July 6, 2017

Mr. Michael Shaunessy
Counsel for the City of Hutto
McGinnis Lochridge
600 Congress Avenue, Suite 2100
Austin, Texas 78701

OR2017-15052

Dear Mr. Shaunessy:

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# 665147.

The City of Hutto (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information pertaining to a specified investigation. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.104, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code.¹ We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note the requested information may have been the subject of a previous request for information, in response to which this office issued Open Records Letter No. 2017-12639 (2017). We have no indication the law, facts, or circumstances upon which the prior ruling was based have changed. Accordingly, to the extent the requested information is identical to the information previously requested and ruled upon, the city must continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2017-12639 as a previous determination, and withhold or release the previously ruled upon information in accordance with it. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001) (so long as law, facts, and circumstances on which prior ruling was based have not changed, first type of previous determination exists where requested information is precisely same information as was addressed in a prior attorney general ruling, ruling is

¹Although you also raise section 552.105 for portions of the submitted information, you provide no arguments explaining how this exception is applicable to the information at issue. Therefore, we assume you no longer assert this exception. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301, .302.

addressed to same governmental body, and ruling concludes that information is or is not excepted from disclosure). However, to the extent the information in the current request is not encompassed by the prior ruling, we will consider the exceptions you raise.

We note the submitted information is subject to section 552.022 of the Government Code. Section 552.022(a) provides, in relevant part:

(a) [T]he following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure unless made confidential under this chapter or other law:

(1) a completed report, audit, evaluation, or investigation made of, for, or by a governmental body, except as provided by Section 552.108[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(1). The submitted information consists of a completed investigation subject to subsection 552.022(a)(1). The city must release the submitted information pursuant to subsection 552.022(a)(1) unless it is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code or expressly made confidential under the Act or other law. Although you raise sections 552.103, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code for the submitted information, these sections are discretionary exceptions to disclosure and do not make information confidential under the Act. *See Dallas Area Rapid Transit v. Dallas Morning News*, 4 S.W.3d 469, 475-76 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1999, no pet.) (governmental body may waive Gov't Code § 552.103); Open Records Decision Nos. 677 (2002) (governmental body may waive attorney work product privilege under section 552.111), 676 at 10-11 (2002) (attorney-client privilege under Gov't Code § 552.107(1) may be waived), 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 663 at 5 (1999) (waiver of discretionary exceptions). Therefore, none of the information subject to subsection 552.022(a)(1) may be withheld under sections 552.103, 552.107, or 552.111 of the Government Code. However, the Texas Supreme Court has held the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and the Texas Rules of Evidence are “other law” that make information expressly confidential for the purposes of section 552.022. *In re City of Georgetown*, 53 S.W.3d 328, 336 (Tex. 2001). Therefore, we will consider your argument of attorney work product privilege under Texas Rules of Civil Procedure 192.5 and your assertion of the attorney-client privilege under Texas Rule of Evidence 503. Section 552.104 provides, however, that information encompassed by section 552.022 may be withheld under section 552.104(a). *See* Gov't Code § 552.104(b) (information protected by section 552.104 not subject to required public disclosure under section 552.022(a)). Further, because section 552.101 can make information confidential under the Act, we will consider the applicability of this exception, and section 552.104, to the submitted information.

Rule 503(b)(1) of the Texas Rules of Evidence provides:

A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made to facilitate the rendition of professional legal services to the client:

(A) between the client or the client's representative and the client's lawyer or the lawyer's representative;

(B) between the client's lawyer and the lawyer's representative;

(C) by the client, the client's representative, the client's lawyer, or the lawyer's representative to a lawyer representing another party in a pending action or that lawyer's representative, if the communications concern a matter of common interest in the pending action;

(D) between the client's representatives or between the client and the client's representative; or

(E) among lawyers and their representatives representing the same client.

TEX. R. EVID. 503(b)(1). A communication is "confidential" if not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure is made to further the rendition of professional legal services to the client or reasonably necessary to transmit the communication. *Id.* 503(a)(5).

Accordingly, in order to withhold attorney-client privileged information from disclosure under rule 503, a governmental body must 1) show that the document is a communication transmitted between privileged parties or reveals a confidential communication; 2) identify the parties involved in the communication; and 3) show that the communication is confidential by explaining that it was not intended to be disclosed to third persons and that it was made in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client. *See* ORD 676. Upon a demonstration of all three factors, the entire communication is confidential under rule 503 provided the client has not waived the privilege or the communication does not fall within the purview of the exceptions to the privilege enumerated in rule 503(d). *Huie v. DeShazo*, 922 S.W.2d 920, 923 (Tex. 1996) (privilege extends to entire communication, including facts contained therein); *In re Valero Energy Corp.*, 973 S.W.2d 453, 457 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1998, orig. proceeding) (privilege attaches to complete communication, including factual information).

You state the information at issue consists of communications involving the city's legal counsel and city representatives. You further state the communications were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the city and these communications have remained confidential. Upon review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the attorney-client privilege to the information at issue. *See Harlandale Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Cornyn*, 25 S.W.3d 328 (Tex. App.—Austin 2000, pet. denied)

(concluding attorney's entire investigative report was protected by attorney-client privilege where attorney was retained to conduct investigation in her capacity as attorney for purposes of providing legal service and advice). Thus, the city may withhold the information at issue under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.²

In summary, to the extent the requested information is identical to the information previously submitted and ruled on by this office, the city must continue to rely on Open Records Letter No. 2017-12639 as a previous determination and withhold or release the information in accordance with that ruling. To the extent the submitted information is not subject to Open Records Letter No. 2017-12639, the city may withhold the submitted information under rule 503 of the Texas Rules of Evidence.

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

Sincerely,



Emily Kunst
Attorney
Open Records Division

EK/eb

Ref: ID# 665147

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

²As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure.