



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

August 8, 2017

Mr. Neal Falgoust
Assistant City Attorney
City of Austin
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767-8828

OR2017-17905

Dear Mr. Falgoust:

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# 669814 (PIR# 34484).

The City of Austin (the "city") received a request for communications pertaining to a specified topic and specified meeting notes. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.106, 552.107, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note you have not submitted any information responsive to the portion of the request seeking information related to specified meeting notes. Thus, although you state the city has submitted a representative sample of the requested information, we find the submitted information is not representative of all the information to which the requestor seeks access. Please be advised this open records letter ruling applies only to the type of information you have submitted for our review. This ruling does not authorize the city to withhold any type of information that is substantially different from the types of information you submitted to this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.302 (where request for attorney general decision does not comply with requirements of section 552.301, information at issue is presumed to be public). Therefore, to the extent information responsive to this aspect of the request exists, we assume you have released it to the requestor. *See* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested

information, it must release information as soon as possible). If you have not released any such information, you must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302.

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 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 attorneys for the city and city employees. You state the communications were made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the city. You further state these communications were intended to be confidential and have remained confidential. Based on your representations and our review, we find you have demonstrated the applicability of the

attorney-client privilege to the submitted information. Thus, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.107(1) of the Government Code.¹

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,



Sidney M. Pounds
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

SMP/sdk

Ref: ID# 669814

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining arguments against disclosure of this information.