



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

December 7, 2017

Ms. Sol M. Cortez  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of El Paso  
P.O. Box 1890  
El Paso, Texas 79950-1890

OR2017-27811

Dear Ms. Cortez:

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# 686893 (City ID# 17-1044-1091/ W049287-091817).

The City of El Paso (the "city") received a request for information pertaining to a specified project during a certain time period, the budget for maintenance of the specified project, and all vendors and subcontractors used to build and maintain the specified project. You state the city will release some of the requested information. 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 Tri-State Electric, Ltd. ("Tri-State"). Accordingly, you state, and provide documentation showing, you notified Tri-State 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 received comments from Tri-State. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

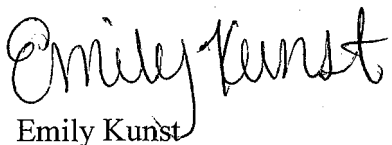
Section 552.104(a) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information that, if released, would give advantage to a competitor or bidder." Gov't Code § 552.104(a). In considering whether a private third party may assert this exception, the supreme court reasoned because section 552.305(a) of 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. Tri-State claims it has competitors. In addition, Tri-State claims release of this information would provide their competitors with a substantial advantage in future bidding processes. 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 Tri-State 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 information we marked under section 552.104(a).<sup>1</sup> 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,



Emily Kunst  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

EK/tdw

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<sup>1</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address Tri-State’s remaining arguments against disclosure.

Ref: ID# 686893

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party  
(w/o enclosures)