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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

February 20, 2018

Mr. Paul A. Fletcher
Counsel for City of Eagle Pass
Langley & Banack, Inc.
745 East Mulberry, Suite 900
San Antonio, Texas 78212

OR2018-03928

Dear Mr. Fletcher:

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# 698850 (ORR# 2017-187).

The City of Eagle Pass (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for the most recent electricity contract and bill. The city does not take a position as to whether the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under the Act. However, the city states, and provides documentation showing, it notified Gexa Energy, L.P. ("Gexa") of the city's receipt of the request for information and of Gexa's right to submit arguments to this office as to why the requested information should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 542 at 3 (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 Gexa objecting to the release of some of the information at issue. We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Gexa asserts some of the submitted information is not responsive to the request for information. A governmental body must make a good-faith effort to relate a request to information that is within its possession or control. *See* Open Records Decision No. 561 at 8-9 (1990). The city has reviewed its records and determined the documents it has submitted are responsive to the request. Thus, we find the city has made a good-faith effort

to relate the request to information within its possession or control. Accordingly, we will determine whether the city must release the submitted information under the Act.

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, the court concluded a private third party may invoke this exception. *Boeing Co. v. Paxton*, 466 S.W.3d 831, 841 (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.* Gexa states it has competitors. In addition, Gexa states release of the submitted agreements, which are located in Exhibit B, would cause it substantial competitive harm and seeks to withhold the terms of a contract. 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 the *Boeing* decision, 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 Gexa has established the release of the information at issue would give advantage to a competitor or bidder. Thus, the city may withhold Exhibit B under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code.¹

We note Exhibit C contains an account number. Section 552.136(b) of the Government Code provides, “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.”² Gov’t Code § 552.136(b). The city must withhold the account number in Exhibit C under section 552.136 of the Government Code.

¹As our ruling is dispositive, we do not address the other arguments to withhold this information.

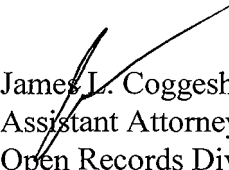
²The Office of the Attorney General will raise a mandatory exception on behalf of a governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 481 at 2 (1987), 480 at 5 (1987).

In summary, the city may withhold exhibit B under section 552.104(a) of the Government Code. The city must withhold the account number in Exhibit C under section 552.136 of the Government Code. 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, 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,



James L. Coggeshall
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JLC/tdw

Ref: ID# 698850

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)

Third Party
(w/o enclosures)